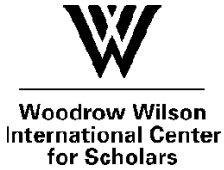
WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS



The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics

Csaba Bekes
Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution Budapest, Hungary

Working Paper No. 16

Washington, D.C.

September 1996

COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

THE COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT
WORKING PAPER SERIES

CHRISTIAN F. OSTERMANN, Series Editor

This paper is one of a series of Working Papers published by the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. Established in 1991 by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) disseminates new information and perspectives on the history of the Cold War as it emerges from previously inaccessible sources on "the other side" of the post-World War II superpower rivalry. The project supports the full and prompt release of historical materials by governments on all sides of the Cold War, and seeks to accelerate the process of integrating new sources, materials and perspectives from the former "Communist bloc" with the historiography of the Cold War which has been written over the past few decades largely by Western scholars reliant on Western archival sources. It also seeks to transcend barriers of language, geography, and regional specialization to create new links among scholars interested in Cold War history. Among the activities undertaken by the project to promote this aim are a periodic *BULLETIN* to disseminate new findings, views, and activities pertaining to Cold War history; a fellowship program for young historians from the former Communist bloc to conduct archival research and study Cold War history in the United States; international scholarly meetings, conferences, and seminars; and publications.

The *CWIHP Working Paper Series* is designed to provide a speedy publications outlet for historians associated with the project who have gained access to newly-available archives and sources and would like to share their results. We especially welcome submissions by junior scholars from the former Communist bloc who have done research in their countries' archives and are looking to introduce their findings to a Western audience. As a non-partisan institute of scholarly study, the Woodrow Wilson Center takes no position on the historical interpretations and opinions offered by the authors.

Those interested in receiving copies of the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* or any of the Working Papers should contact:

Cold War International History Project
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20523

Telephone: (202) 691-4110
Fax: (202) 691-4001
Email: COLDWAR1@wwic.si.edu

CWIHP Web Page: http://cwihp.si.edu

COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT WORKING PAPERS SERIES
Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor

#1 Chen Jian, "The Sino-Soviet Alliance and China's Entry into the Korean War"

#2 P.J. Simmons, "Archival Research on the Cold War Era: A Report from Budapest, Prague and Warsaw"

#3 James Richter, "Reexamining Soviet Policy Towards Germany during the Beria Interregnum"

#4 Vladislav M. Zubok, "Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The 'Small' Committee of Information, 1952-53"

#5 Hope M. Harrison, "Ulbricht and the Concrete 'Rose': New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-61"

#6 Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-62)"

#7 Mark Bradley and Robert K. Brigham, "Vietnamese Archives and Scholarship on the Cold War Period: Two Reports"

#8 Kathryn Weathersby, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-50: New Evidence From Russian Archives"

#9 Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail M. Narinsky, "New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports"

#10 Norman M. Naimark, "'To Know Everything and To Report Everything Worth Knowing': Building the East German Police State, 1945-49"

#11 Christian F. Ostermann, "The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback"

#12 Brian Murray, "Stalin, the Cold War, and the Division of China: A Multi-Archival Mystery"

#13 Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain"

#14 Ruud van Dijk, "The 1952 Stalin Note Debate: Myth or Missed Opportunity for German Unification?"

#15 Natalia I. Yegorova, "The 'Iran Crisis' of 1945-46: A View from the Russian Archives"

#16 Csaba Bekes, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics"

#17 Leszek W. Gluchowski, "The Soviet-Polish Confrontation of October 1956: The Situation in the Polish Internal Security Corps"

#18 Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-68: New Evidence from Chinese Sources"

#19 Matthew Evangelista, "'Why Keep Such an Army?'" Khrushchev's Troop Reductions"

#20 Patricia K. Grimsted, "The Russian Archives Seven Years After: 'Purveyors of Sensations' or 'Shadows Cast to the Past'? "

#21 Andrzej Paczkowski and Andrzej Werblan, "'On the Decision to Introduce Martial Law in Poland in 1981' Two Historians Report to the Commission on Constitutional Oversight of the *SEJM* of the Republic of Poland"

#22 Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg, "77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77"

#23 Vojtech Mastny, "The Soviet Non-Invasion of Poland in 1980-81 and the End of the Cold War"

#24 John P. C. Matthews, "Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1956"

#25 Stephen J. Morris, "The Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970's: The View from Moscow"

#26 Vladimir O. Pechatnov, translated by Vladimir Zubok, "'The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will...' Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946"

#27 James G. Hershberg, with the assistance of L.W. Gluchowski, "Who Murdered 'Marigold'? New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland's Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966"

#28 Laszlo G. Borhi, "The Merchants of the Kremlin—The Economic Roots of Soviet Expansion in Hungary"

#29 Rainer Karlsch and Zbynek Zeman, "The End of the Soviet Uranium Gap: The Soviet Uranium Agreements with Czechoslovakia and East Germany (1945/1953)"

#30 David Wolff, "'One Finger's Worth of Historical Events': New Russian and Chinese Evidence on the Sino-Soviet Alliance and Split, 1948-1959"

#31 Eduard Mark, "Revolution By Degrees: Stalin's National-Front Strategy For Europe, 1941-1947"

#32 Douglas Selvage, "The Warsaw Pact and Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1963-1965"

#33 Ethan Pollock, "Conversations with Stalin on Questions of Political Economy"

#34 Yang Kuisong, "Changes in Mao Zedong's Attitude towards the Indochina War, 1949-1973"

#35 Vojtech Mastny, "NATO in the Beholder's Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949-1956"

#36 Paul Wingrove, "Mao's Conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, 1953-55"

#37 Vladimir Tismãneanu, "Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian Workers' Party: From de-Sovietization to the Emergence of National Communism"

#38 János Rainer, "The New Course in Hungary in 1953"

#39 Kathryn Weathersby, "'Should We Fear This?' Stalin and the Danger of War with America"

#40 Vasiliy Mitrokhin, "The KGB in Afghanistan" (English Edition)

Special Working Papers Series

#1 Mark Kramer, "Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980-1981"

FOREWORD

Much has been written about the international aspects of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution over the past forty years. However, especially regarding the East-bloc side of events, scholars for the most part were unable to gain access to official documents and had to depend instead upon less authoratative sources such as press and media coverage, official pronouncements, and memoirs. Consequently, until recently, many questions surrounding the international aspects of the Revolution could only be answered somewhat speculatively.

In the late 1980s, however, American, British, French, and other West-European archival materials from 1956 became accessible to researchers, and, in 1992, many of the most crucial Soviet documents were also released. Thus, for the first time scholars may move beyond speculative analysis to informed scholarship on the Revolution.[1]

This study is an attempt to examine, analyze, and evaluate the international consequences of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the reaction of the Great Powers, and the Revolution's influence on international politics, using previously inaccessible sources to illuminate the top levels of executive decision-making. I have also relied upon--where relevant and accurate--earlier works on 1956 published in the West,[2] as well as the results of Hungarian research conducted after 1989.

With this range of historical sources, this study can be considered a precursor to a larger, more comprehensive work dealing in detail with the roles of the Great Powers in the history of the Hungarian Revolution.[3] The present work contains the most important theses and conclusions that will form the basis of the forthcoming monograph.

******

Taking a closer look at East-West relations in the fifties, one can see that, American propaganda and Eastern European expectations notwithstanding, between 1953 and 1956 the Soviet Union never considered letting the satellite states desert the Communist bloc and the West did not for a moment intend to liberate these countries. On the contrary: these years saw the

---

[1] See Note on Sources.

[2] The most important works I relied on were: Miklós Molnár, *Budapest 1956: A History of the Hungarian Revolution* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971); János Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972); Ferenc Vali, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961); Brian McCauley, "Hungary and Suez, 1956: The Limits of Soviet and American Power," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (October 1981), pp. 777-800; and Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986).

[3] This working paper is based on the following publications: Csaba Békés, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 36:138 (Summer 1995), pp. 109-121; and Csaba Békés, *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom a világpolitikában. Tanulmány és válogatott dokumentumok* [The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics. A Study and Selected Documents] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet [1956 Institute], Budapest, 1996).

On certain aspects of the topic there have been published some works based on research in the recently opened archival sources, of which I could rely on the following: Daniel F. Calhoun, *Hungary and Suez, 1956: An Exploration of Who Makes History* (University Press of America, 1991); John C. Campbell, "The Soviet Union, the United States and the Twin Crises of Hungary and Suez," in W.M. Louis and R. Owen, ed., *Suez 1956. The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). pp. 233-253; James David Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality: The Eisenhower Administration and Unrest in Eastern Europe, 1953-1959* (Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 1990; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1993); , Valerij Muszatov, "Szovjet politikai beavatkozás és katonai intervenció Magyarországon 1956-ban" [Soviet Political and Military Intervention in Hungary in 1956], *Múltunk* 4 (1991), pp. 159-170; János M. Rainer, "Szovjet döntéshozatal Magyarországról 1956-ban" [Soviet decision-making on Hungary in 1956], in *Évkönyv II* (Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1993), pp. 19-38; and Janos M. Rainer, "The Yeltsin Dossier: Soviet Documents on Hungary, 1956," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 5 (Spring 1995), pp. 22, 24-27.

emergence of a radically new era of East-West relations--negotiations instead of confrontation--a process that paralleled that of the Soviet Union's rise to strategic parity with the United States. In respect to Eastern Europe, as early as 1955-56 this new situation was prelude to a consensus between the superpowers that would eventually lead to the codification of the European status quo in the Helsinki agreement of 1975.

Consequently, the Hungarian Revolution was not only against American interests, but an outright inconvenience for the Eisenhower Administration. The turbulent events in Hungary disturbed and--at least for a while--halted the by then promising détente process.

The American leadership, however, having been fully aware from the beginning of how limited their possibilities were, maintained a dualistic approach to the crisis. On the one hand, they tried to minimize the harm that their obligatory condemnation of the Soviet intervention would do to the budding Moscow-Washington relationship. On the other, they were eager to convince the world that the United States was not standing idly by while an Eastern European nation was fighting for its freedom. In order to promote these contradicting interests, the American leadership was compelled to improvise political steps, the most visible of which was the presentation of the Hungarian issue to the UN Security Council on 28 October 1956.

However, real decisions within the Western Alliance were not made in the Council meetings, whose debates were orchestrated for the international public, but instead behind the scenes in secret negotiations among American, British, and French representatives. Yet because of the Suez Crisis, the relationship of the great Western powers had become seriously strained by the end of October. From that time on, Great Britain, France, and the United States all tried to use the Hungarian issue to promote their own individual interests. While the French and the British wanted the UN General Assembly (hereafter UNGA) emergency session convened to deal with the Suez Crisis to discuss the Hungarian question, the Americans tried everything in their power to prevent that from happening. The US government was successful insofar as the UN failed to take any concrete actions regarding the Hungarian situation before the second Soviet intervention on November 4. Consequently, many Hungarians' expectations of military help from the West, as well as their hope that Western political pressure through the UN would prove effective in forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw from Hungary, both proved to be illusions.

For the Soviets, the only question was how long they could rely on political solutions--the Polish reform initiative being a case in point--before feeling compelled to resort to armed intervention. This question was deliberated and settled by the Soviet Politburo in Moscow on the second day of their October 30-31 meeting. They drew the justifiable conclusion that the Leninist-Stalinist Bolshevik system was in extreme danger in Hungary and that armed intervention was the only way they could restore it.

The most important lesson that the non-response of the Western states to the second Soviet intervention taught those willing to abandon their illusions was that--despite the most ardent propaganda to the contrary--a system of Eastern and Western spheres of interest, based on the mutually accepted post-war European status quo, did exist and was in practice. In this system, the region of Eastern Europe was securely consigned to its place within the Soviet sphere. Those who could not acknowledge the reality of the situation, even after having seen the fate of the Hungarian Revolution (blaming the passivity of the West on the Suez crisis, for example), were to be confronted again and again with new proofs of the solidity of the status quo, as the reform attempts of the following decades all failed in Eastern Europe, reiterating a fact that had become obvious for the first time in Hungary in 1956.

East-Central Europe and the Great Powers (1953-56)

The Soviet Union

After Stalin's death, the new Soviet leadership attempted to make significant changes in both the domestic life and foreign policy of the empire. In the late-1940s, the Soviet Union--whose economy had still not recovered from the trauma of World War II--began spending heavily in order to keep pace with the United States in the arms build-up which had begun with the Cold War.

Following the formula which had proved effective in the 1930s, the capital necessary for weapons production was to be generated through an extensive diversion of resources from the agricultural and consumer-goods sectors of the economy. It is for this reason that the new Soviet leadership, especially during Malenkov's premiership (1953-1955), attempted to mitigate domestic unrest by establishing a more balanced economic structure marked by reduced emphasis on heavy industry, particularly arms production. However, the Soviet plan to reduce expenditures on arms could only be implemented within the context of a general improvement of East-West relations, which had until then been based upon mutual fear of direct confrontation.

Accordingly, beginning in 1953 Soviet foreign policy became much more flexible and for the first time since the closing stages of World War II the Soviet Union displayed a willingness to negotiate and compromise with the Western powers. This change in Soviet comportment ultimately opened the way for an end to the Korean War and led to such a significant reduction in East-West tension that the mid-1950's are justifiably referred to as the first period of détente.

Soviet foreign policy had four main trends in the years preceding 1956.[4] First, it was marked by attempts at a rapprochement with Britain, France, and the rest of Western Europe as well as the United States without seriously contemplating any change in the status quo. With the onset of détente, the Soviet Union's relations with the West, based on a growing parity in the balance of power as well as a mutual acceptance of the post-World War II status quo in Europe, was to receive a new definition. Although Moscow did in fact respect the sanctity of the European spheres of influence throughout even the chilliest years of the Cold War, Western Europeans were nonetheless constantly worried about the possibility of a Soviet attack. The new course in Soviet foreign policy gave rise to a greater sense of security in Western Europe. The increased Soviet inclination toward negotiation was also largely due to the fact that even though they had, with the development of the hydrogen bomb (first demonstrated by the USSR in August 1953), largely caught up to the United States in the arms race, the differing geopolitical location of the two countries still left the Soviet Union in a vulnerable position since it was not capable of directly attacking the American continent until the advent of intercontinental ballistic missiles at the end of the 1950s. The Soviet shift to a more conciliatory foreign policy also had another, more concrete motivation: they hoped to prevent the rearmament of West Germany by sowing discord within the Western Alliance.

The Soviets nonetheless clearly defined the limits of the compromises they were willing to make throughout the entire course of negotiations with the West, and it soon became obvious that they were only disposed to discuss issues such as that of the status of Germany and Austria, on which the great Western powers had been unable to agree upon among themselves. The irreconcilability of Soviet and Western positions regarding German reunification ultimately prevented the sides from reaching any kind of agreement, and when West Germany joined NATO in 1955, the question was taken off the agenda for quite some time. The resolution of the Austrian question in the same year nevertheless demonstrated the willingness of the Soviet leadership to bargain with the West: in exchange for a pledge to withdraw their troops from the country, the Soviets were able to get the Western powers to agree permanently to uphold Austria's strict neutrality and to allow those Eastern European countries which were not already members of the United Nations to join the world organization. However the Soviets never considered the issue of the satellite countries to be negotiable; in fact, since the Kremlin's ratification of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 would remove the legal basis for continued presence of its troops in Hungary and Romania, the Soviet Union used this as an opportunity to strengthen the cohesiveness of its empire

---

[4] For a classic survey of Soviet foreign policy, see Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence; Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1973* (New York, 1974). For recent accounts on the topic based on the use of new Soviet archival sources see A. O. Chubarian, ed., *Sovetskaja vesnaja politika v retrospective 1917-1991 [Soviet Foreign Policy in Retrospect, 1917-1991]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993); L.N. Nezhinskij, ed., *Sovetskaja vesnaja politika v godi hlodnoj vojni (1945-1985) [Soviet Foreign Policy in the Cold War years 1945-1985)]* (Moscow: Mezdunarodnaja Otnashenija, 1995); and *Politicheskie krisy i konflikty 50-60.h godov v "Vostochnoj Jevrope" [Political Crises in Eastern Europe]* (Moscow, 1993).

by establishing the communist bloc's military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, one day before the signing of the treaty on Austria.[5]

A second main trend of Moscow's pre-1956 foreign policy lay in the fact that even though the Soviet leadership itself respected the post-war European status quo, this did not mean that they had given up on the idea of expanding the Soviet Union's sphere of influence in general. Soviet expansionist ambitions centered now on the new countries born in the wake of the rapid disintegration of the colonial empires after World War II, i.e., the Third World. Contrary to the strong-arm methods it had used to subjugate Eastern Europe after World War II, the Soviet Union was able peaceably to bring many of these primarily Arab and Asian countries into its political orbit. People in these underdeveloped countries, where there was a strong and natural demand for an accelerated modernization, found alluring the Soviet social and economic model emphasizing equality and centralized planning. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Soviet foreign policy aimed at exploiting opportunities for ideological expansion into the Third World through intensive propaganda and, where necessary, economic aid. By this time, the Soviets had also begun discreetly to provide some of these countries with arms and military advisors. Soviet prudence in this area was proved later at the time of the Suez crisis in October-November 1956: not only did the Soviets completely exclude the option of providing direct military support to Egypt, but Soviet military specialists and advisors immediately left the country so as not to become embroiled even indirectly in conflict with the Western powers.[6] A few days later, when it became clear that the United States itself would compel Great Britain and France to cease their armed attacks on Egypt, the Soviets resumed their propaganda strategy (in the form of nuclear bluster aimed at the Anglo-French-Israeli coalition) of portraying themselves as the champion of the independence of the Arab countries and the small peoples of the world in general.

A third major pre-1956 objective of the new post-Stalin Soviet leadership was to repair the cracks and fissures which had appeared in the socialist bloc through the break with Yugoslavia in 1948. In May 1955, Khrushchev and Bulganin went to Belgrade in an attempt to make amends with Tito, blaming Stalinist policies for the deterioration in relations between the two countries and communist parties. Throughout 1955 and 1956, the Soviets made several conciliatory gestures toward Yugoslavia, such as giving public sanction to the tenet that there could be more than one valid way to build socialism. The Soviet leadership, which was still only capable of thinking in terms of military blocs, did not really believe in what they were saying: their policy of conciliation toward Tito was, in fact, designed to bring Yugoslavia slowly and peacefully back into the socialist camp and, more specifically, to draw it into the Warsaw Pact. These steps, however, did not imply that Moscow was prepared to accept the Yugoslav model for its East European satellites.

A fourth important aim of Soviet foreign policy in East-Central Europe was to maintain stability at any cost. The Soviets were so keenly aware of the mounting social unrest in East Germany that in early June 1953 they invited East German party leaders to Moscow and instructed them to introduce a more liberal political direction to their country. This (ultimately short-lived) period of reform in East Germany, known as the "New Course," was marked not only by a reduction in heavy industrial production and a corresponding increase in the production of consumer goods, but also reduced restrictions on foreign travel, the suspension of the collectivization of agriculture, an end to curbs on religious practices, and even, briefly, the removal of the word "socialism" itself from the regime's propaganda vocabulary. For the Soviets all this was intended, in addition to a means to alleviate social discontent, to create a better climate for future negotiations with the West on the potential reunification of Germany. The June 1953 Berlin uprising erupted despite all these precautions, and partly because the GDR leadership was reluctant to follow the instructions from Moscow.[7] Soviet political intervention to suppress the turmoil was vigorous and concise, though Moscow continued to try to moderate East Germany's radical policies.

---

[5] The Warsaw Pact was established on 14 May 1955; the Austrian State Treaty was signed the next day.

[6] McCauley, "Hungary and Suez, 1956," p. 786.

[7] For recent scholarship on the Berlin uprising see: James Richter, "Reexamining Soviet Policy during the Beria Interregnum," CHIWP Working Paper No. 3 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars,

It was the same concern which made the Soviets intervene politically in Hungary and replace Rákosi with Imre Nagy in June 1953. And though the permissible pace and scope of post-Stalin political reform in Eastern Europe depended greatly upon which faction happened to have the upper hand in the incessant power struggles among the Kremlin leaders, there was never any question in Moscow that the satellite states would remain inside the Soviet empire. But they were prepared to consider a moderate revision of the principles underlying relations between the USSR and its East European allies and to regulate this relationship. This revision found expression in the Soviet government declaration of 30 October 1956, which, contrary to earlier assumptions, was formulated before the upheavals in Poland and Hungary, in mid-October at the very latest, and was merely updated in accordance with the new political developments.[8] Beyond outlining considerably more equitable foundations for relations between the Soviet Union and its satellite states, this pronouncement asserted unambiguously that each socialist country had the right to find its own way toward internal political reform only so long as it did not stray beyond the confines of the Soviet bloc.

The Soviets were, however, extremely wary of Yugoslavia's growing influence in Eastern Europe, most importantly in Poland and Hungary, suspecting reasonably that knowledge of the Yugoslav socialist model--with an active popular front and extensive workers' self-management as well as consideration for local and national concerns--might prove to be more attractive in this region than the Soviet pattern. Therefore, at the end of the summer of 1956 the CPSU presidium sent a secret communiqué to the leaders of the satellite countries cautioning them that the Soviet Union took a dim view of exaggerated promotion of the Yugoslav model.

At the same time the Soviet leadership, whose concern about the East European political developments heightened after the Poznan uprising in June 1956, were eager to avoid further outbreaks of social discontent in the region by applying means of political intervention. This is why in July 1956, Moscow decided to replace Rákosi as the head of the Hungarian communist party in order to ease political tensions in the country. The CPSU CC leadership also sent Politburo member Anastas I. Mikoyan to Budapest and on his advice the Hungarian party Central Committee accepted Rákosi's resignation and elected Erno Gero as party chief. However, Mikoyan also informed the Hungarian leaders that should unexpected events occur in the country, the Soviet Union would not hesitate to come to the party's aid.[9] A similar message was communicated by Khrushchev to Tito through Veljko Micunivic, the Yugoslav Ambassador in Moscow, informing him that if the situation deteriorated further the Soviet leadership was prepared to use all possible means to overcome a crisis in Hungary since the Soviet Union could not permit a breach in the socialist camp's front line.[10]

The Western Great Powers

The policy of the first Eisenhower administration (1953-56) toward those countries of East-Central Europe that had landed in the Soviet sphere of influence after World War II was characterized by a peculiar duality.[11] During his 1952 electoral campaign, Eisenhower (along with

---

June 1992); For the US response see Christian Ostermann, "The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback," CWIHP Working Paper No. 11 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, December, 1994).

[8] Sir William Hayter, British Ambassador in Moscow, sent reports to London on a document in preparation, regulating Soviet-Satellite relations from as early as May, 1956. For the first publication of this finding see: Csaba Békés, "New Findings on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution," *CWIHP Bulletin* 2 (Fall 1992), p. 2.

[9] Mikoyan's report to the CPSU CC, 14 July 1956, in Vjacseszlav Szereda and Alekszandr Sztikalin, eds., *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetébôl. Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB Levéltárából. [Missing Pages from the History of 1956: Documents from the Archives of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party]* (Budapest: Móra, 1993), p. 40. (Hereafter referred to as *Missing Pages.*)

[10] Veljko Micunovic, *Moscow Diary* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), note of 15 July 1956.

[11] For the most important accounts on the policy of the Eisenhower administration vis-a-vis Eastern Europe see Bennett Kovrig, *Of Walls and Bridges: The United States and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University

his would-be Secretary of State John Foster Dulles) had made the so-called peaceful liberation of captive nations an integral part of the Republican Party platform; they loudly declared that the Truman Administration's policy of containment of communism was not befitting the United States as leader of the free world and that ultimately only a more offensive posture would compel the Soviet Union to surrender its East European domain. Accordingly, the American government devoted considerable sums toward funding of subversive radio stations and other such organizations as well as Eastern European emigré organizations. Reference to liberation of the captive nations--though exactly how it was to be accomplished was never made clear--was, until October 1956, a staple of high-level American political pronouncements, which were subsequently transmitted to Eastern Europe by various propaganda organizations, particularly the government-funded Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Voice of America (VOA). All this served to create the illusion, not only in Eastern Europe and the United States, but throughout the entire world, that the United States, which had in fact never shown any real interest in the region, had made the liberation of these nations a cornerstone of its foreign policy and of East-West relations in general.

In reality, however, US foreign policy of this era was based on a thorough pragmatism characterized by recognition of the post-World War II European status quo and the prevailing balance of power with the Soviet Union as well as the avoidance at all costs of superpower conflict. The United States, together with the other Western powers, tried to exploit the new disposition of the post-Stalin Soviet leadership in order to open negotiations regarding issues which they found to be vital to their interests, such as ending the Korean War, a settlement in Southeast Asia, disarmament, reunification of Germany, and the status of Austria.

Thus, particularly after discovering in 1955-56 that the Soviets were making unexpectedly rapid progress toward developing an intercontinental ballistic missile, the United States sought to mitigate East-West political tension by finding an acceptable modus vivendi with the Soviet Union--one which was to become known to the world as peaceful coexistence.

The communist countries of Eastern Europe did not receive a prominent role in this process since the United States, in its typical great power way of thinking, considered the Soviet Union to be its only legitimate negotiating partner. During this period of East-West reconciliation and rapprochement the Western powers sought to put the issue of the so-called satellite states on the negotiating table with the Soviets[12] but it became quickly apparent--especially at the time of the July 1955 Geneva summit and in the interval prior to Khrushchev and Bulganin's official visit to Britain in April 1956--that the Soviet Union, which in certain respects had already surpassed the United States in the arms race, was only willing to negotiate from a position of strength. In this way the Soviets were only prepared to discuss issues which had not yet been settled from their perspective and any mention of their previous foreign conquests continued to activate a Stalinist rejection reflex.

Thereafter the United States and the other Western powers considered the question of Eastern Europe to be of secondary importance compared to that of overall East-West détente, a position which is quite understandable when viewed from an international political perspective. Though they had not abandoned hope that the peoples of Eastern Europe would eventually regain their independence, by autumn 1956 Western political officials had concluded that, for the time being, the Yugoslav political model--"national communism"--offered these countries the greatest opportunity for gaining a degree of both internal and external autonomy.[13]

Press, 1991); Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*; László Borhi, "Az Egyesült Allamok Kelet-Európa politikájának néhány kérdése 1948-1956" [Some Aspects of American policy toward Eastern Europe], *Történelmi Szemle* 3 (1995).

[12] For surveys on British and French policy toward the region see Joseph Frankel, *British Foreign Policy, 1945-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Wolfram F. Hanrieder and Graeme P. Auton, *The Foreign Policies of West Germany, France & Britain* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980); Brian White, *Britain, Détente, and Changing East-West Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

[13] In the United States a new policy paper on Eastern Europe, replacing NSC 174, was adopted by the National Security Council in July 1956. See NSC 5608 and NSC 5608/1, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957* [hereafter *FRUS* with volume and page numbers], vol. 25, *Eastern Europe*

Thus the Western powers--contrary to what was to become for decades thereafter one of the principle elements of communist propaganda--not only did not help to ignite the Hungarian revolution or the resistance of Poland to Moscow, but did not even remotely expect that an open conflict, let alone an armed uprising, would erupt in one of the Soviet satellite states. The Western powers had no pre-existing strategy except that military intervention was absolutely ruled out of the question under any circumstances designed to deal with such an unexpected event.

The Revolution and World Politics

For the historian it is clear now that the Revolution's fate was decided by international politics, above all, by the decisions of the Soviet leadership, acting in the context of overall world politics. In order to understand these moves, it is necessary to survey the international implications of all that happened in Hungary after the uprising started on October 23. If the events of the preceding years were connected to changes in world politics, after the outbreak of the armed revolt and the Soviet intervention, Hungary's fate came to be almost entirely dependent on the reactions of the great powers and other members of the world community.

Hopes and Illusions in Hungary

Although the claim was incessantly repeated by communist propagada, the West was not directly responsible for instigating the Hungarian revolution. However, the aforementioned dual foreign policy of the United States toward Eastern Europe undoubtedly contributed indirectly to the fact that social unrest in Hungary eventually manifested itself in the form of an armed uprising. Those young workers and students who risked their lives in taking up arms against the overwhelmingly superior forces of the Soviet military and Hungarian secret police (AVH) were, for the most part, thoroughly convinced by all the misleading liberation propaganda that the West, particularly the United States, would make good on the implicit promises to provide armed assistance to the Hungarian people if it rose up against Soviet domination, or at the very least would employ all the political weapons at its disposal in order to force the Soviet Union to acquiesce in the Hungarian desire for independence.[14]

The principal foreign political demands of Hungarian society at the time of the Revolution were, for the most part, not founded upon an awareness of world political realities. This is due partly to the fact that the general public held illusions which hindered, and in some instances even precluded, a clear assessment of Hungary's international circumstances, and partly to the general propensity of people to make unrealistic demands amidst the tumult of revolution.

A significant portion of Hungarian society mistakenly believed (and still believes) that the spheres of influence established in Europe after World War II were merely temporary arrangements and that the Revolution offered the Western powers an exceptional opportunity to alter them in their favor. The majority of Hungarians were only able to perceive those world political trends which were encouraging for their aspirations. Although the new orientation of East-West relations was leading to a rapprochement between the two superpowers, the Hungarians continued to believe in the unchanged US propaganda emphasizing that America would never write off the so-called captive nations. The armed freedom-fighters in particular, outmanned and outgunned, counted on military intervention and harbored the greatest illusions regarding the world political environment, although

---

(Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990), pp. 190-194 and 216-221 respectively. For the changed attitude of NATO countries see: Public Record Office, London, Kew, Foreign Office General Correspondence FO 371 (henceforward: PRO FO 371) 122081 N 1059/9. The British NATO delegation to the Foreign Office on the October 24 meeting of the NATO Council, 24 October 1956.

[14] According to a public opinion poll among Hungarian refugees in Austria the great majority (96%) of the interviewed persons had expected some kind of U.S. support, and of these 77% believed that it would be military support. International Research Associates, Inc. Hungary and the 1956 Uprising, Personal Interviews with 1,000 Hungarian Refugees in Austria, February 1957 as cited in Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, p. 417.

they generally grasped that their struggle against the vastly superior Soviet forces would fail without outside support. Consequently the insurgents ardently appealed both personally to individual Western journalists and diplomats and *en masse* before the Budapest legations of the Western powers for political and military intervention as well as arms and ammunition.[15]

It is important to note that the nonbelligerent political entities which sprang up at the time of the uprising, such as the revolutionary and national committees and the workers' councils, like the reformist political parties,[16] did not make similar requests for direct Western assistance. This stemmed partly from the general inclination toward self-restraint characteristic of the Revolution's initial stages--for most people were quite aware that a blatant repudiation of Moscow would certainly provoke immediate Soviet intervention--and partly from the fact that most of these revolutionary organs were directed by intellectuals and workers who tended to advocate an essentially socialist "third road" for Hungary which precluded the idea of Western military intervention.

The widespread illusions regarding the United Nations' will and ability to mediate a settlement of the Hungarian crisis are reflected clearly in the various revolutionary organizations and press. Hungarian expectations regarding UN mediation were nonetheless of a most diverse nature: there was a universal hope among Hungarians that the Security Council or General Assembly could induce the Soviets to resolve the Hungarian crisis peacefully; others went even further in their expectations, calling for UN observers or immediate intervention by UN military forces. All these hopes were seemingly supported by the fact that the UN (to which Hungary gained membership in 1955) could be regarded as a neutral international crisis management forum, the resolutions of which therefore could be accepted by the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it could be argued, that the same forum had proved to be an efficient means for containing communist expansion during the Korean war. Relatively few Hungarians realized that in fact the UN was able to act effectively only in disputes not between the superpowers or their allies. The UN intervention in Korea proved to be an exception (facilitated by a momentary Soviet boycott of the Security Council) which, however, was able only to contain communist expansion, not roll it back.

Practically from the very outset of the uprising, the various revolutionary programs gave special prominence to the demand that Soviet troops withdraw from Hungary, a contingency which was commonly regarded as an essential precondition for the general restoration of national independence. The only issue on which the general Hungarian public unanimously agreed was the demand for sovereignty; they were less certain about what should happen once independence was gained. Many Hungarians imagined a future based on the Yugoslav model: a peculiar Hungarian socialism, exempt from the political distortions of Stalinism, along with a neutral or non-aligned foreign policy. This concept predominated at the time among intellectuals and to some extent workers. Others, however, thought that only a western style parliamentary democracy would be the right solution: for them, the bourgeois construction of government and political neutrality acquired by Austria only a year before in a rare moment of superpower accord appeared as the most attractive model. But lack of time and opportunity (i.e., the suppression of the revolution) made it impossible to ascertain how popular these varying concepts actually were.

Hungarian public opinion thus was unanimous on the sovereignty issue, and all political programs presumed Hungary's desire to remain outside the great power blocs. This aim surfaced in two interrelated demands which became general by the last days of October: withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and proclamation of Hungary's neutrality.

Contributing greatly to the general popularity of the neutrality concept was the seemingly rational (though it too turned out to be erroneous) premise that the Soviet Union would not see any increased security threat in a neutral Hungary. It was also generally believed that since the Soviets

---

[15] PRO FO 371 122378 NH 10110/175 Minute by Thomas Brimelow, Head of the Northern Department, 25 October, 1956; National Archives, Washington DC, Department of State, RG 59, Central Files, 764.00/10-2556. Printed in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25: 280-286. Transcript of a teletype conversation between the U.S. legation in Budapest and the Department of State, 25 October 1956.

[16] Izsák Lajos, "Az 1956-os forradalom pártjai és programjaik" [Political Parties in the Revolution and their programs], *Múltunk* 2-3 (1992), pp. 102-124.

had assented to a negotiated withdrawal from Austria, they might well consider doing likewise in Hungary. The flaw in this logic was that whereas the Soviet withdrawal from Austria had come about as a result of a laboriously negotiated compromise between the great powers, similar action in Hungary would have required unilateral concessions on the part of the Soviet Union variable which was, naturally, not part of the great power equation.

Foreign Policy of the Imre Nagy Government

From the very moment Imre Nagy became prime minister on October 24, he was faced with increasingly radical demands not only with regard to the internal reorganization of Hungarian society, but also concerning the restructuring of the country's international status, specifically, its position within the Soviet alliance.

Though few were aware of it at the time of the outbreak of the Revolution, Nagy had circulated a theoretical treatise among his friends in January 1956[17] expressing support for the *pancha sila*, the five basic tenets of the nonaligned movement with regard to peaceful coexistence: these principles, proclaimed at the 1955 Bandung conference, included mutual respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, noninterference in domestic affairs, equality, reciprocal benevolence, and fraternal cooperation, and identified the totality of these principles with the concept of national independence. Nagy also expressed his conviction that national independence was not simply a question of achieving international autonomy, but also had a social dimension as well. Concretely, he believed that the Yugoslav model--that is, a socialist domestic order coupled with a nonaligned foreign policy--offered Hungary the greatest chances for achieving national independence. It is important to note that none of Nagy's thinking presupposed Hungary's taking any sort of unilateral action; he hoped that the encouraging trends perceptible in international political relations would eventually lead to the dissolution of the contentious world power blocs, thus enabling the countries of central and eastern Europe to continue to build socialism on a new foundation of national independence and equality and noninterference in internal affairs.

Nagy considered the latter scenario to be all the more possible in light of the Soviet Union's apparently friendly disposition toward the nonaligned movement at that time, which included ostensible acceptance of the aforementioned five principles. It was above all the Soviet Union's post-Stalin rapprochement with Yugoslavia that fed the general illusion that the Kremlin was prepared to accept the principle that building socialism could be based on a model other than its own.

It was Imre Nagy's thankless task as prime minister to reconcile his measured vision regarding the restructuring of Hungary's international relations with the increasingly radical demands of the Revolution. Nagy was always very aware of the fact that the fate of the Revolution was entirely in the hands of the Soviet Union; and from the very outset of negotiations held with a high-ranking Soviet crisis-management delegation led by Politburo members Mikoyan and Mikhail Suslov,[18] he attempted to convince the Soviets that with adequate support he would be capable of stabilizing the internal situation.

The peaceful resolution of the Polish crisis[19] likely strengthened Nagy's conviction that the Soviets were interested in achieving a comparable settlement in Hungary, even if they had to grant

---

[17] Published in English as Imre Nagy, *On Communism: In Defence of the New Course* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957).

[18] The Soviet delegation which arrived in Budapest on October 24 consisted of Politburo members A.I. Mikoyan and M.A. Suslov, KGB head I. Serov, and deputy chief of staff M.S. Malinin. While Mikoyan and Suslov conducted talks with the Hungarian leaders, Serov and Malinin were in the country incognits so the fact of their presence in Hungary during the Revolution was revealed only by Soviet archival sources declassified in 1992.

[19] In Warsaw on October 19 the 8th Plenum of the Polish United Workers Party elected Wladyslaw Gomulka as party first secretary despite of the intervention of Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders who flew to the Polish capital in an effort to prevent the anticipated changes in the leadership. Eventually the crisis situation, threatening the danger of Soviet military intervention, was resolved by a compromise: the Soviets accepted the new Polish leadership,

concessions to do so. It was for this reason that on October 25 Nagy suggested that calling for Soviet intervention had been a mistake and that in the interest of calming unrest among the people it would be wise to announce the government's intentions to initiate negotiations regarding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. Later that day, Nagy made this announcement, despite vigorous Soviet objections, in the course of a radio address.[20] The next day, Nagy, stressing the extreme social pressures under which the Hungarian leadership was operating, attempted to convince the Soviet delegation that beyond suppression of armed resistance, the most effective way to bring the prevailing disorder under control would be to place the party at the head of the mass social movement which had materialized with the Revolution.[21]

The events of the following days seemed to vindicate Nagy's policy toward the Soviets; his pledges to consolidate the situation in Hungary were designed to extract further concessions from them: on October 29, Soviet military units began withdrawing from Budapest and the Soviet government's public declaration of the following day included an explicit promise that it would lay new foundations for relations between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries based on equality and non-interference in domestic affairs; in addition, it promised to consider a decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Hungary.

At nearly the same moment, however, signs of the Soviet Union's real intentions began multiplying at an alarming rate: as already mentioned, beginning on October 31 came reports that fresh Soviet troops were entering the country, occupying all important strategic locations. It was only at this point, when it became clear that a Soviet invasion was imminent, with the obvious aim of overthrowing the incumbent Hungarian government, that the cabinet decided to make an heroic last-ditch effort to rescue the Revolution: on November 1 Nagy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and declared the country's neutrality.[22] At the same time he sent an appeal to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarkskjold requesting that the four great powers defend Hungary's neutrality and that this question be urgently placed on the agenda of the upcoming UNGA session.[23]

The Nagy government had turned to the great Western powers and the United Nations--with the ideal of Austrian-style neutrality in mind--in a last-ditch effort to stave off the increasing threat of a Soviet invasion. Nagy himself was nevertheless quite aware of the extreme improbability of vigorous assistance from either the great Western powers or the UN; he was also quite familiar with Soviet imperial politics and thus recognized that within the existing international political context it was likewise very improbable that the Soviet leadership would relinquish one of its strategically important dominions just because the government there had declared its independence.

Thus, even as Nagy launched a further appeal for UN action on November 2[24], he continued to work desperately behind the scenes to reach a modus vivendi with the Soviets. In the first days of November, Nagy summoned the ambassadors of the socialist countries, above all Soviet Ambassador Yuri Andropov, to try to persuade them of the correctness of his policies. Moreover, Nagy informed Andropov that he was willing to rescind his appeal to the UN in exchange for a

---

while Gomulka assured Moscow that the political reforms in Poland would neither jeopardize the basis of the communist regime nor Poland's firm membership in the Soviet bloc.

[20] Telegram of Mikoyan and Suslov to the CPSU CC, 25 October 1956, in Éva Gál, András B. Hegedüs, György Litván, Janos M. Rainer, eds., *A "Jelcin-dosszié". Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról. [The "Yeltsin Dossier": Soviet Documents on 1956]* (Budapest: Századvég K.--1956-os Intézet, 1993), p. 51. (Hereafter referred *The "Yeltsin Dossier."*)

[21] Telegram of Mikoyan and Suslov to the CPSU CC, 26 October, 1956, in *Missing Pages*, p. 111.

[22] For the text of the declaration of neutrality, see Paul Zinner, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe: A Selection of Documents on Events in Poland and Hungary, February-November 1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 463-464

[23] For the text of Nagy's telegram to Hammarkskjold see Zinner, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe*, pp. 462-463.

[24] For the text of Nagy's November 2 telegram to Hammarkskjold see Zinner, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe*, pp. 462-463.

Soviet pledge not to engage in further military intervention; Nagy also requested an immediate audience with the highest-level Soviet leadershipa request which the Soviets promptly denied. Finally, in discussions in Budapest with a Romanian party delegation on November 3, Nagy attempted to coordinate a plan whereby Romanian leader Ghorge Gheorghiu-Dej would petition Khrushchev for a Soviet-Hungarian summit meeting.[25] On that same day, however, the Soviet leadership was holding a summit meeting of a very different nature in Moscow with János Kádár in order to coordinate the violent overthrow of the Hungarian revolutionary government.[26]

The Soviet Bloc and the Revolution

The Soviet leadership, occupied with the political crisis in Poland starting on October 19, only reluctantly agreed to comply with Gero's request that Soviet troops assist in the dispersal of the mass demonstrations in Budapest on October 23.[27] However, on the basis of repeated appeals from the Hungarian party first secretary and, most importantly, pressure from Ambassador Andropov (declaring the situation very dangerous), the Soviet Politburo soon decided to intervene and ordered their troops in Hungary to move to Budapest. The next day, October 24, they sent a crisis-management delegation to Budapest consisting of Mikoyan, Suslov, KGB chief Serov and the deputy chief of staff, I. Malinin. For several days after the outbreak of armed conflict, Khrushchev and the rest of the Soviet leadership continued to maintain hope that the newly appointed prime minister, Nagy, would effectively quell the reigning disorder and that the Hungarian crisis could ultimately be resolved within the same framework of compromise and negotiation which had proved successful in Poland. In negotiations conducted with Nagy and the rest of the Hungarian leadership on October 26, Mikoyan and Suslov defined the outer limits of possible Soviet concessions in their expression of a willingness to allow some politicians who had previously belonged to noncommunist parties into the government (the possibility of a multiparty system was not even considered) and a return of Soviet troops to their bases after the restoration of order--similar to what had occurred in Poland. They also warned the Hungarian leadership that further concessions might very well lead to the overthrow of the communist system, an eventuality which the Soviet delegation quite clearly suggested would evoke a vigorous response from Moscow. [28] The Soviet leadership never entertained the slightest notion of allowing the restoration of a parliamentary system in Hungary for fear that it would lead to the disintegration of its crucial East European security zone.

There were also significant ideological factors motivating the Soviets to suppress the Hungarian Revolution. As previously mentioned, during these years Soviet attempts to enlarge the world communist empire centered on the Third World; the Soviet leadership could well imagine the damage that might be done to these expansion efforts if Hungary were to be seen restoring

---

[25] János M. Rainer, "Nagy Imre külpolitikája" [The foreign policy of Imre Nagy] Magyar Nemzet, 15 August 1991, and *Döntés a Kremlben*, p. 91.

[26] For the discussion of the Soviet Politburo with Kádár and Münnich on November 2 and 3 see *Döntés a Kremlben*, pp. 75-82 and 88-90, respectively.

These recently published Soviet sources reveal, however, that it was not János Kádár's original intention to form a counter-government when he left together with Ferenc Münnich for the Soviet Union on November 1. On their first meeting with the members of the Politburo on November 2, Kádár sought to convince the Soviet leaders that still there was a chance to resolve the crisis peacefully. However, by the next day, when they met again--this time the Presidium was supplemented by Khrushchev and Malenkov as well--he recognized that the decision had already been taken in Moscow and the only issue facing him was whether he was willing to collaborate or not.

[27] On the first Soviet intervention on 24 October 1956, see Az 1956. október 24-i moszkvai értekezlet [The 24 October 1956 Moscow meeting] Közli Hajdu Tibor In: Évkönyv I. Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1992 (Yearbook for 1992, 1956 Institute) pp. 149-156. For the English text of the minutes on the meeting see "Hungary and Poland, 1956: Khrushchev's CPSU Presidium Meeting on East European Crises, 24 October 1956," introduction, translation and annotation by Mark Kramer, in *CWIHP Bulletin* 5 (Spring 1995), 1, 50-56.

[28] Telegram of Mikoyan and Suslov to the CPSU CC, 26 October 1956, *Missing Pages*, p. 112

multiparty democracy by way of an anti-Soviet uprising nearly ten years after the institution of communism.

The Soviets regarded the following elements to be of paramount importance to the maintenance of the communist system in the eastern European satellites: a competent and unified communist party leadership; a potent and resolute state security apparatus; a loyal and disciplined armed force and military leadership; and strict party control of all media. Any hint of unrest in any of these four institutions immediately set off warning bells within the Soviet decision-making mechanism; the breakdown of all four of them at once, as happened in Hungary in 1956, left the Soviets with only one option: armed intervention.[29]

However, it was in the short-term interests of the Soviet Union to exercise this radical option only if all possible peaceful means of resolving the crisis had already been exhausted; the Soviet desire to preserve communist bloc unity and the process of rapprochement with Yugoslavia, to improve the standing of communist parties in the West and propaganda efforts in the Third World and to consolidate a peaceful resolution to the Polish crisis, all weighed in against the option of armed intervention.

Tactical considerations also compelled the Soviets to make further concessions: On October 28, they assented to a cease-fire, agreed to withdraw their military units from Budapest--without having first eradicated the groups of armed rebels--and did not dispute officially the passage in the new government communiqué pertaining to the initiation of negotiations over the eventual withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. The Soviet government pronouncement of October 30 contained further pledges to examine the possibility of troop withdrawals from Hungary.[30]

As many suspected at the time, the Soviet leaders had serious debates about the Hungarian situation from the very beginning of the crisis. Reflecting the gravity of the situation, the presidential body met nearly every day between October 23 and November 4: the main question was to what extent and in what way they should compromise with the Nagy government, so that the latter would be able to consolidate the crisis in a way that would preserve both Hungary's social system and its place in the Soviet alliance. Consequently they agreed unanimously that Hungary's separation from the socialist bloc was simply unimaginable and should be prevented at all costs. Probably the greatest possible compromise was that even on October 30, there was consideration of the option of accepting the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary, provided Budapest secured the necessary conditions.

The developments of the days following the government's acceptance on October 28 of the Revolution's essential demands (the evaluation of the events as revolution, the reinstallment of a multiparty system, the dissolution of the secret police, the disintegration of the party leadership, and the passivity of the armed forces) convinced the Soviets that Hungary's Leninist-Stalinist-type communist system was in jeopardy of collapsing. They concluded, correctly, that Nagy--whom they already held to be opportunistic and irresolute--was unable, and worse yet, unwilling to restrain those forces which were threatening to break up the entire Soviet system.

This assessment led the Soviet leadership to conclude that the possibilities for a peaceful resolution of the crisis had been exhausted; accordingly, on the second day of its session of October 30-31, the CPSU CC Presidium decided in favor of armed intervention and set Operation Whirlwind in motion.[31]

---

[29] The importance of the first three factors is emphasized in Rainer, *The "Yeltsin Dossier,"* p. 25. while my attention was drawn to the role of the mass media in this respect by Peter Kende.

[30] For the English text of the Soviet Government's declaration of 30 October 1956, see Zinner, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe*, pp. 485-489.

[31] The recently discovered minutes of V. N. Malin, head of the General Department of the Central Committee on the meetings of the Soviet Politburo in October-November, 1956 were published in Hungarian in: Döntés a kremlben... For the Russian text of the same documents see Vjacheslav Sereda, ed., "Kak resalis `voprosi Vengrii,'" part 1, *Istoricheski Archiv* 2 (1996), pp. 73-104. The second part of the documents is to be published in issue 3 of the same journal. An English translation is scheduled to appear in the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, beginning with issue no. 8.

During the first days of November, Khrushchev (together with other Politburo members) had hurried, secret negotiations with the leaders of Eastern European socialist-bloc countries--the Poles on November 1 in Brest, the Bulgarians, Romanians, and Czechoslovaks on November 2 in Bucharest--all of whom assured the Soviets of their support. The East German, Czechoslovak, Romanian, and Bulgarian leaders had been observing the Hungarian events with apprehension from the beginning, so it was a great relief for them that the Soviet Union had finally committed itself to restore law and order: Czechoslovak leaders discussed the possibility of joining in the invasion, while Romanian leaders did not hesitate to let Moscow know their willingness to intervene.[32]

The reshuffled Polish government on the other hand, with Gomulka at the helm after the October crisis, firmly supported Nagy's efforts to consolidate the situation, and condemned the first Soviet intervention. Accordingly, the Polish public--uniquely in the Soviet bloc--could openly express solidarity with the Hungarian revolution through mass demonstrations, manifestos, blood-donor and charity campaigns, while the Polish press carried objective reports on the events. At the end of October, two Polish communist party delegates went to Budapest to obtain direct information from Hungarian leaders, especially Nagy and János Kádár, about the current state of affairs, and to urge them that Hungary's only plausible way out of the crisis lay in following the "Polish road." By the beginning of November, even the reformist Polish government observed the fundamental political changes that were taking place in Hungary with considerable apprehension. Besides, withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and the declaration of neutrality were political moves that, for the Polish, jeopardized the post-war geopolitical structure, more specifically and frighteningly the security of the Polish-German border. Thus Gomulka was compelled to accept reluctantly the Soviet decision about preparations for intervention--under the pretense of saving socialism--even though he must have been hoping all along, just as Nagy did, that somehow a violent outcome could be avoided. This is why the official announcement of the Polish communist party to the nation, which had been ratified on November 1 after the Brest meeting and published the following day, still stated that socialism in Hungary should be defended by the Hungarian people, and not ensured by foreign intervention.[33]

Chinese leaders, who had just started to re-evaluate their relationship with Moscow after Khrushchev's 20th Party Congress speech, at first sympathized with the Polish and Hungarian movements in the hope they would limit Soviet (as opposed to communist) influence in Eastern Europe. Soon, however, it turned out that the reform of the socialist system itself was only tolerated in Beijing to the extent of the Polish changes. Thus, by the beginning of November, the Chinese, like the Soviets, considered the aggravated Hungarian situation to be a counter-revolution, and Nagy a traitor. Accordingly, after the Chinese communist party delegation (led by Liu Shaoqi) arrived in Moscow on October 24, they eventually agreed on every principal question of the planned measures concerning Hungary.[34]

---

[32] A special collection of East German, Czechoslovakian and Romanian documents relating to local reactions to the events in Hungary is in the possession of the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Budapest. The East German documents were selected by Rainer Barth, while the Czechoslovak sources were placed in the Hungarian National Arcives as a result of an official exchange of historical documents between Prague and Budapest. Romanian Politburo documents on the Hungarian crisis were published by Mihai Retegan: "Conducerea P.M.R. si evenimentele din Polonia si Ungaria, 1956," *Archivele Totalitarismului* 1 (1995),pp. 137-162.

[33] On Polish reactions to the Hungarian Revolution see the works of János Tischler: "A lengyel pártvezetés és az 1956-os forradalom" [The Polish Party Leadership and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution], in *Évkönyv III* (1994),(Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1994); "Magyar-lengyel kapcsolatok a korai Kádár-korszakban, 1958 nyaráig" [Hungarian-Polish Relations in the Kádár era till the Summer of 1958], in *Évkönyv IV (1995)* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1995); *Revolucja wegierska 1956 w polskich dokumentach. Opracowat János Tischler. Dokumenty do Dziejow PRL zeszyt 8. Institut Studiów Politycznych Polskej* (Warsaw: Akademii Nauk, 1995).

[34] The Malin notes reveal that the members of the Chinese delegation, apart from other discussions with the Soviet leaders, took part at the Politburo meetings on 24, 26 and 30 October 1956.

The Kremlin leaders also held secret negotiations with Tito on the night of November 2-3 on the island of Brioni; this was the meeting that the Soviets worried most about, acutely aware of the powerful effect of Yugoslav propaganda on the activities of radical Hungarian party opposition, and thus indirectly on the intellectual groundwork for the revolution. Moreover, Tito had assured Nagy of his support in a letter to the Central Leadership of MDP (Hungarian Labour Party) on October 29, sympathizing with his new policy of reassessment, but at the same time firmly warning him against the dangers of counter-revolution. The Hungarian events of the following days, however, disappointed Tito, who originally hoped that Hungary would follow the Yugoslav example in every respect. Instead he had to realize that the newly emerging system--skipping a major step--was starting to resemble the Austrian model, which he of course found unacceptable. Therefore, to the great relief of Khrushchev and Malenkov, the Yugoslav leadership not only agreed that intervention was necessary, but also promised to help eliminate Imre Nagy and his adherents from political life.[35]

The Western World, the Suez Crisis, and the United Nations

The Western public, who felt somewhat guilty about the tragedy of the East European "enslaved nations," received the news of the Polish and, especially, the Hungarian events of October 1956 with distinctive sympathy from the very beginning. Not only in Europe and North America but, aside from the Soviet bloc (with the exception of Poland), nearly all over the world there were smaller or greater events--protests and demonstrations--organized to express support for the Hungarian Revolution. The press and the electronic media, represented by Western correspondents and camera crews who could work undisturbed in Budapest, reported at first hand and for the first time on an armed uprising that broke out and, for a time, appeared to be succeeding, in an allied state of the Soviet Empire. The Western public observed with a mixture of fear and wonder the struggle of revolutionaries, who were fighting the superior numbers of Soviet troops with small arms and Molotov cocktails. As to the Nagy government, they largely condemned it until October 28. However, once the government and rebels reached an agreement that the Soviet Union seemingly also accepted, the general atmosphere in the West was that of hope and expectations: suddenly, many considered the unthinkable, that a Soviet satellite would liberate itself without external help.

At the same time, Western governments--unlike their public opinion which expressed strong solidarity with the Hungarian uprising--acutely recognized their limited room to maneuver within the existing European status quo. They reacted with extreme caution to the uprising in Hungary from its very beginning and, in most instances, went so far as explicitly and publicly to endorse the principle of nonintervention. Behind the Western response was the realization that under the prevailing international political circumstances, any Western military intervention in Hungary contained the implicit threat of war with the Soviet Union, quite possibly to be waged with nuclear weapons, which would likely lead to the obliteration of the very Eastern European peoples which intervention was designed to liberate (to say nothing of potential devastation of Western countries).

Nevertheless, between armed intervention and total passivity there could have been alternative responses, with the goal of influencing Soviet decision-making in a positive direction. The question is whether the governments of the United States, Great Britain, and France ever considered these possibilities at all, and whether (and if so, how) the Suez crisis at the end of

---

[35] On Yugoslav policy towards the Hungarian Revolution and its aftermath see Micunovic, *Moscow Diary*; László Varga, "Moszkva--Belgrád--Budapest. A jugoszláv kapcsolat 1956. október--november," in *Jalta és Szuez között* ["Moscow-Belgrade-Budapest: The Yugoslav Connection October-November, 1956," in *Between Yalta and Suez*] (Budapest: Tudósítások Kiadó, 1989); Pierre Maurer, *La réconciliation sovéto-yougoslave 1954-1958: Illusions et désillusions de Tito* (Cousset (Fribourg), Delval, 1991); Zoltán Ripp, *Belgrád és Moszkva között. A jugoszláv kapcsolat és a Nagy Imre-kérdés (1956 november--1959 február)* [Between Belgrade and Moscow. The Yugoslav Connection and the Imre Nagy issue (November 1956-February 1959)] (Budapest: Politikatörténeti Alapítvány 1994); *Top Secret ...*

October, in which Britain and France were heavily involved, influenced the foreign policy of the three great powers toward Hungary.

The United States

The tumultuous events in Poland and, particularly, Hungary in October 1956 caught the American government completely off-guard even though it was extremely well-informed about the political changes taking place in these countries. Secretary of State Dulles had already publicly distanced the Eisenhower Administration from the possibility of armed intervention during the Polish crisis, stating in a television interview on October 21 that the United States would not send troops to Poland even in the event of a Soviet invasion.[36] The Administration welcomed with what it deemed to be a positive outcome of the crisis, for, without any American involvement and contrary to pessimistic predictions, the Soviets had not intervened militarily and had agreed to accept the new Polish leadership.

The Administration thus found the news of the uprising in Hungary to be all the more disturbing, especially since it appears to have had no previously prepared strategy for dealing with such an unlikely contingency. Notwithstanding the "liberation" and "roll-back" propaganda it had aimed at Eastern Europe, even the United States, the world's greatest military power, possessed only very limited options for any sort of intervention within the Soviet sphere of influence. It was nonetheless very important for the United States to conceal this impotence in order to preserve its international prestige: it was for this reason that on October 24, Dulles suggested to Eisenhower that the issue of Soviet intervention should be broached in the UN Security Council,[37] which indeed occurred four days later at the request of the three Western powers.

On October 26, the United States' highest-level advisory body, the National Security Council (NSC), sat for the first and last time during the Hungarian Revolution to evaluate the East European situation and to plan what kind of official response to make. Among the general confusion which reigned during the session there was one intelligent proposal advanced, by Harold E. Stassen, the president's disarmament advisor: Stassen suggested assuring Moscow that the United States would not seek to exploit the possible independence of the satellite countries in any way that could threaten the security of the Soviet Union.[38] Although the NSC promptly rejected this suggestion, the next day the plan's proponents got Eisenhower to endorse an expanded version of the original proposal. According to this plan, the United States, either through Tito or some other diplomatic channel, would attempt to convince the Soviets that a zone of strictly neutral, non-NATO countries, politically akin to Austria, would offer them just as much security as the existing buffer of satellite countries.[39] The essential logic behind the proposal was that during negotiations regarding the Austrian State Treaty it was precisely the Soviets who had insisted that Austria remain strictly neutral and not be allowed to join NATO. Of course the same possibilities for compromise did not apply to the East European Soviet satellite countries as had applied to Austria, but within the strict confines which circumscribed the United States' room to maneuver, a plan offering the possibility of mutual concession, such as the plan then being proposed, was preferable to complete passivity. Ultimately Eisenhower instructed Secretary of State Dulles to build the message to the Soviets into a presidential campaign speech Dulles was to deliver in Dallas on October 27.[40] However, Dulles, who had opposed the proposal from its very inception because it offered the Soviets exaggerated

---

36 *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:274.

37 *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:273.

38 Eisenhower Library, White House Office, National Security Council, Staff Papers. Minutes of the 301th meeting of the National Security Council, 26 October 1956, in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:295-299.

39 Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, Administrative Series. Harold E. Stassen to Eisenhower, 26 October 1956, in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:305.

40 Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, White House Telephone Conversations Series, Memorandum of Conversation between Eisenhower and Dulles, 26 October 1956, in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25: 305-306.

ideological concessions, watered it down--partly with the president's assent and partly on his own initiative--dropping any reference to both neutrality and prohibition on NATO membership. In the end, his message to the Soviets consisted, in toto, of the following celebrated sentence: "We do not look upon these nations as potential military allies."[41]

This fundamentally modified version of Stassen's original proposal did not achieve its original aim of pacifying the Soviets, or perhaps more precisely, achieved it to an exaggerated degree. Whereas the original idea had been to try to induce Soviet concessions through explicit recognition of Moscow's security interests, the revised version took on a distinctly defensive tenor which the Soviets logically assumed to mean that the United States was not going to take any action whatsoever on behalf of East European independence. The American leadership nonetheless went to great lengths to make absolutely sure that the message reached its addressee: on October 28, Henry Cabot Lodge, the US representative to the United Nations, quoted the passages from Dulles's speech which concerned the satellite countries during a session of the Security Council[42]; on October 29, the US ambassador in Moscow received instructions to reiterate confidentially the germane points of the speech to the Soviet leadership, including Zhukov[43]; and on October 31, Eisenhower himself reiterated the previously cited passage in the course of a televised address.[44]

Dulles' statement, despite the fact that usually its role in pacifying the Soviets is emphasized, was of historical significance, even in this radically altered version. Prior to this, all the Eisenhower Administration's official statements regarding the satellite states presumed that, should these states gain independence, they would join the Western world, which implied NATO membership. Therefore, stating that Washington did not consider these states as potential military allies was in fact a renunciation of its earlier position, and the starting point of a process that would determine US policies in subsequent following decades, one that eventually did away with the two-faced character of American foreign policy by cleaning out the remains of "liberation" propaganda and clearing up its ambiguity.

At the end of October, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE), prepared jointly by the CIA, State Department, and military intelligence organizations, determined that the Soviets had only two options: either accede to Hungary's desire for independence and risk unleashing similar forces throughout the satellite countries or to reinstate forcibly their supremacy over the country. The report's authors left no doubt as to which option the Moscow leadership would choose in an emergency.[45] Regarding possible US policy toward the crisis, a NSC advisory committee concluded on October 31 that prospects for concrete action were extremely limited, although its report did contain one well-founded proposal for compromise with the Soviet Union, according to which, if the Soviets withdrew their troops from Hungary, the Americans would, in exchange, proportionally reduce the number of their troops stationed in Western Europe.[46]

The agenda for the November 1 NSC meeting called for deliberation over this document; however before the meeting convened, President Eisenhower, at Dulles' urging, decided to postpone discussion on Eastern Europe until a later date so that the group could devote its entire time

---

[41] For the full text of the speech see *Department of State Bulletin* 5 November 1956; selected parts of the speech, in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:317-318.

[42] United Nations. Security Council. Official Records. 734th-755th Meetings inclusive. New York, 1956.

[43] *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:328.

[44] *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:351.

[45] *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:330-335.

[46] NSC 5616. US Policy toward Developments in Poland and Hungary, 31 October 1956. An unsanitized copy of the document is in the National Security Archive, Washington DC. The idea of mutual troopwithdrawal was very likely included in the document on Harold E. Stassen's initiative, who prepared a minute on October 29 proposing exactly the same plan. (Eisenhower Library, White House Office, NSC Staff. OCB Central Files). Stassen's proposal was published in Csaba Békés, "Demokratikus eszmék és nagyhatalmi érdekek. Egy megvalósulatlan amerikai javaslat az 1956-os magyar forradalom megsegítésére" [An Unrealized American Plan to Support the Hungarian Revolution in 1956], *Holmi* 10 (1993), pp. 1402-1408.

and energy to the Suez crisis, which had erupted into armed conflict on October 29.[47] The American leadership was not again inclined to occupy itself with the events taking place in Hungary until the time of the second Soviet intervention on November 4. Eisenhower and Dulles had decided that since the United States really didn't have any effective means of exerting its influence inside the Soviet sphere, its energies should be concentrated on resolving the Suez crisis where it was faced with the task of laying down the law not with a rival superpower, but with its own military and political allies. Despite considerable complications, this was a much easier and more feasible undertaking and within just a few days the resolute American actions, particularly economic arm-twisting of Britain, had borne fruit.

NATO, which was gaining increasing significance in Western European integration during these years, had been concerned since June 1956 with the question of how the West should react to the challenge of the Eastern European changes which had happened after 1953. On October 24, the NATO Council was supposed to have discussed a proposition, which had just been completed after long months of preparations, about their policy towards the satellite states. Due to the Polish and Hungarian events of a few days before, however, there was no possibility for a proper debate, so the surprised delegates emphasized first of all that the study had apparently misjudged the role of Titoism as the only evolutionary possibility for Eastern European countries to achieve greater independence.[48] The Council had more meetings during the Hungarian revolution, where on the one hand they tried to evaluate the current situation, and on the other hand they tried to consider possibilities for action. Ultimately, however, they could agree only that NATO should not explicitly take sides, because this would only provide the Soviet Union with a pretext for further intervention.[49]

Thus the sole international political forum willing seriously to consider the Hungarian crisis was the United Nations. However, the aforementioned conflict of interest among the great powers at the time of the simultaneous outbreak of the two international crises began to play itself out in the UN as well, just a few days after the Hungarian question had been placed on its agenda.

Great Britain, France, and the Suez Adventure

The governments of Britain and France, which were already preoccupied with preparations for an attack on Egypt, were likewise caught off guard by the developments in Eastern Europe. Indeed, due to their paramount desire for success in the Middle East, the British and French reaction to the Soviet intervention in Hungary was even more cautious than the habitually restrained response of Western governments to Eastern European events.

Contrary to the well-known remarks by Dulles cited above, relatively few accounts note that both the British and French governments sent similar signals to the Kremlin which implied a recognition of Soviet security interests in Eastern Europe. On October 26, French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, in a speech to a gathering of journalists, stressed that although the Western powers welcomed the developments which were taking place in Eastern Europe, they would be ill-advised to try to exploit them for their own military and political benefit; Pineau insisted furthermore that raising the issue of relations between the West and Eastern Europe was still dangerously premature and that, as for France, it would not intervene in Poland or Hungary under any circumstances.[50] The British were even more adamant about avoiding even an inadvertent provocation of the Soviets and, furthermore, about not giving them grounds for accusing the West of having in any way instigated the Hungarian revolt. According to an October 27 memorandum by Deputy Under-

---

[47] Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, NSC Series. Minutes of the 302nd meeting of the National Security Council, 1 November 1956, in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:358-359.

[48] PRO FO 371 122081 N 1059/9. The British NATO delegation to the Foreign Office on the October 24 meeting of the NATO Council, 24 October 1956.

[49] PRO FO 371 122380 Telegram No. 180 of the British NATO delegation to the Foreign Office on the October 27 meeting of the NATO Council, 27 October 1956.

[50] PRO FO 371 122063 NH 1012/26 British Embassy, Paris to the Foreign Office, No. 392. 27 October 1956.

Secretary of State Sir John Ward, top-secret sources had informed London that the Soviets were preparing for Western intervention in Hungary.[51] Accordingly, on November 1, the government declared in parliament: "It is not our slightest intention to try and exploit the events taking place in Eastern Europe in order to undermine the security of the Soviet Union."[52]

The striking simultaneity of the Suez and Hungarian crises inevitably raises the question whether the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution had any bearing on the timing of the attack on Egypt which was planned during secret British-French-Israeli negotiations held at Sèvres between October 22-24.[53] Recently published monographs and primary source materials reveal that the date for the Israeli attack on Egypt (October 29) was almost certainly set during the first day of the Sèvres talks.[54] When this conditional timetable was established, the British and French foreign ministers immediately made it clear that they would have preferred the Israeli attack to be fixed for an even earlier date. The rationale for this was not the presumption that the Soviet Union would be preoccupied with the crisis in Hungary, as is commonly assumed, since the Hungarian Revolution broke out only on the next day. However, the Polish crisis, which broke out a few days earlier (on October 19), may have influenced the timing of the attack--a suggestion which appears in some Israeli sources. But the most important reason for the British and French haste was undoubtedly that their expeditionary forces had been in a state of full preparedness--a condition which could not be maintained indefinitely--for quite some time simply awaiting the political green light to begin the attack on Egypt.

The official protocol of the secret Sèvres negotiations, signed on October 24, fixed the Israeli attack for five days later; thus the outbreak of the Hungarian uprising did not cause the slightest change to the existing strategy and, contrary to earlier suppositions, did not accelerate the date of the military action. Available sources even raise doubts as to whether the subject of Hungary came up during the final day of negotiations on October 24, when news of the Budapest uprising could well have reached the conspirators. According to Ben Gurions's diary, he learned of the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution and the alleged Soviet suppression thereof only after his return to Israel, around midday on October 25.[55]

The Hungarian Question in the United Nations

The US administration, primarily for reasons of prestige, decided on October 25 that, in concert with its allies, it would initiate discussion in the United Nations on the subject of the Hungarian uprising.[56] But the British and French initially expressed reluctance when Dulles proposed the next day that the three countries launch a joint initiative to convene a meeting of the Security Council.[57] With the Suez action having already been secretly decided upon, the British and French leadership worried that UN discussion of the Soviet intervention in Hungary might serve as a precedent for a similar debate over the imminent joint Israeli-British-French attack on Egypt which was to take place a few days hence. But, having kept Washington in the dark, they opted to accede

---

51 PRO FO 371 122379 NH 10110/221 Minute by Sir John Ward, 27 October 1956.

52 PRO FO 371 122808 NS 1051/96 Foreign Office minute, 1 November 1956.

53 Conf. Miklós Molnár: Budapest 1956, p.203.

54 The most important recent publications on the Suez Crisis based on declassified archival sources are: Richard Lamb, *The Failure of the Eden Government* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987); Louis and Owen, eds., *Suez 1956*; Keith Kyle, *Suez* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1991); S.I. Troen and M. Shemesh, eds., *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal* (London: Frank Cass, 1990); Mordechai Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel: The Road to Sinai-1956* (Hebrew), published in Israel in 1991. The October 22 date is mentioned in the contemporary diary of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in "The Diary of Ben Gurion," *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 308.

55 "The Diary of Ben Gurion," *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956*, p. 315.

56 *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:290-291.

57 PRO FO 371 122378 NH 10110/188 Foreign Office minute, 26 October 1956; DDF 1956 Tome III. p. 19.

to American pressure and on October 27 the United States, Britain, and France submitted a joint request that the Security Council sit to examine the situation in Hungary.

From then until 3 November, the representatives of these three powers met continually behind the scenes to hammer out a common UN strategy; the behavior of the United States, Britain, and France during the three Security Council sessions which dealt with the Hungarian question--on October 28 and November 2 and 3--was completely planned in advance during these secret negotiations.[58]

In the days preceding the Israeli attack on Egypt, the UN representatives of the three Western powers agreed that it was imperative to condemn harshly the Soviet intervention, but beyond this action they would adopt a wait-and-see policy until the confused situation in Hungary was clarified. Consequently, the three Western powers which had placed the Hungarian question on the agenda did not even introduce a draft proposal during the October 28 Security Council session. After the Middle East fighting widened on October 31 with the engagement of Britain and France, the tenor of the negotiations among the Western powers regarding Hungary changed completely. Eisenhower and Dulles, who placed increasing importance on establishing good relations with the Arab world with the aim of expanding American influence in the Middle East, reacted angrily to its European allies' actions. Not only did the US leaders publicly condemn the Anglo-French intervention, they also instructed the American UN representative to submit a draft proposal calling for the immediate cessation of all military operations in the Middle East, a motion which brought about the circumstance, unprecedented in UN history, of Soviet and American representatives voting in concert against Britain and France.

As a result of the sudden deterioration in relations among the Western powers, their subsequent discussions on Hungary were conducted in an increasingly icy atmosphere in which the negotiating partners were not really interested in condemning, much less impeding, Soviet intervention, but wanted rather to exploit the Hungarian crisis to advance their own, in this case drastically conflicting, great power interests. Beginning at this time, the British and French undertook to move the Hungarian question moved from the Security Council to the General Assembly emergency session on Suez, in the hope that the simultaneous treatment of two issues would mitigate the censure they were receiving. Transferring the Hungarian question to UNGA would have been of incidental benefit to the revolutionary forces in Hungary, for in the UNGA there is no veto power, which left at least the theoretical possibility that the UN would pass a resolution critical of Moscow's actions. But the American leadership, its overriding priority to resolve the Middle East crisis, did everything possible to frustrate the aforementioned Anglo-French strategy, and until November 4 succeeded in preventing the British and French from submitting a draft proposal on Hungary in the Security Council and further blocked them from referring the question to the UNGA emergency session via the "uniting for peace" procedure.

After the second Soviet intervention, the US UN representative, Henry Cabot Lodge, unilaterally implemented the British-French strategy without asking for the cooperation of his European Security Council allies, with whom he had broken off negotiations regarding Hungary the previous day as a punishment for their actions in Suez. When the Security Council subsequently convened upon the news of the renewed Soviet intervention on 4 November, Lodge initiated a measure which effectively circumvented the Soviet veto and referred the Hungarian question directly to the UNGA emergency session. On the same afternoon, a large majority of this body voted to adopt a draft resolution--likewise submitted unilaterally by the US representative--which condemned

---

[58] For the story of the secret talks of the three Western Great Powers on the Hungarian situation see: Csaba Békés, "A brit kormány és az 1956-os magyar forradalom" [The British Government and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution], in *Évkönyv I (1992)* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1992), pp. 19-38, and "A magyar kérdés az ENSZ-ben és a nyugati nagyhatalmak titkos tárgyalásai 1956. október 28. - november 4. (Brit külügyi dokumentumok)" [The Hungarian Issue in the UN and the Secret negotiations of the three Western Great Powers - British Diplomatic Records], in *Évkönyv II* (1993) (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1993), pp. 39-71.

the Soviet intervention, called for it to withdraw its troops, and recognized the right of the Hungarian people to a government which would represent its national interests.[59]

At the same time, this resolution--which the British and French supported despite its unilateral submission by the United States--made no reference to the recognition of Hungary's neutrality, for which Nagy had so emphatically and desperately appealed in his messages to Hammarkskjold on November 1 and 2. This may be due in part to the fact that there was much disagreement within the American leadership regarding whether Hungary's neutrality served US interests. The concept of Hungarian neutrality engendered a good deal of support in the State Department where it had already surfaced as a topic of discussion days before Nagy launched his appeals to the UN. President Eisenhower himself sympathized with the idea of establishing a zone of neutral states in Central and Eastern Europe, but he hoped to achieve this aim through negotiations with the Soviets in a broader framework of a general reconstruction of East-West relationships. Overtly supporting the one-sided radical move of the Hungarian government, i.e., recognizing its neutrality, had the possible danger that Washington would take on an international responsibility which would be extremely difficult to cast off after the uprising's suppression, which seemed close at hand. However, it was more important for Eisenhower that such a diplomatic move, due to the probably vehement Soviet reaction, would have seriously jeopardized the Soviet-American relations, and indirectly the whole détente process. As for Dulles, who had sharp misgivings regarding the increasingly powerful nonaligned movement, and was therefore generally ill-disposed toward the idea of neutrality, he, not surprisingly, came out against the idea with regard to Hungary. The secretary of state firmly believed that if, perchance, Hungary were to succeed in its struggle to free itself of Soviet domination, the United States should not be satisfied with its neutrality when there existed a real possibility of incorporating it fully into the Western sphere of influence.[60]

In the early morning of November 4, the United States nonetheless fervently condemned renewed Soviet intervention in Hungary. Eisenhower even sent a personal message of protest to Bulganin and in this way succeeded in leading the world to believe that it had, from the very outset, played a constructive role in attempts to settle both the Suez and Hungarian crises.

The real clash of conflicting viewpoints in the United Nations, contrary to earlier interpretations, took place not between the Western powers and the Soviet Union during meetings of the Security Council--where what was said on both sides was primarily for public consumption--but behind the scenes, in secret negotiations between the representatives of the United States, Britain, and France.

The result of the discord which arose in relations among the Western powers over Suez was that the UN was unable to take firm steps toward the resolution of the Hungarian question at a time (from November 1-3) when the circumstances in Hungary, such as Nagy's request for UN mediation, might have made such steps feasible.

However, one should not overestimate the potential influence of any UN resolution by the General Assembly emergency session condemning Soviet intervention, a measure which remained a distinct possibility right up until November 3. The Soviet Union, in light of its status as a world superpower and the reassuring pledges it had received from the United States, was by no means disposed to let the moral authority of UN resolutions prevent it from intervening militarily, if necessary, to restore order in a country within its own sphere of influence.

The discord among the Western powers caused by Suez no doubt made things easier for the Soviets, though it seems fairly certain that even without the Middle East crisis Moscow would have pursued a similar policy, just as they would make the same decision regarding Czechoslovakia in 1968. Similarly, Western passivity was not caused by the Suez crisis, but by a

---

[59] United Nations. General Assembly. Official Records. First and Second Emergency Special Sessions, 1-10 November 1956. Plenary Meetings and Annexes. New York: 1956. Minutes of the plenary meeting on 4 November 1956. A/3286.

[60] Minute of discussion between Harold E. Stassen and John Foster Dulles, 26 October 1956, in *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 25:305.

limitation to its range of options in Eastern Europe implicit in the prevailing international status quo and the notion of spheres of influence. The Suez crisis simply served as a handy excuse, especially for the United States, in order to explain why, after years of liberation propaganda, it was not capable of extending even the smallest amount of support to an East European nation which had risen in arms in an attempt to liberate itself from Soviet domination.

THE REVOLUTION IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The East-West Relationship

An intensive study of the international aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution using archival sources remains to be done. However, drawing upon the sources presently available and the work already published on the subject, it is worth attempting to produce a rough sketch of the impact of the Hungarian (and Polish) events of October-November 1956 on international politics, especially on East-West relations.

The most obvious consequence of the failed Revolution in international politics was that the Western states' lack of response proved conclusively their unconditional de facto acceptance of the post-war European status quo, despite all earlier propaganda to the contrary. This was a great consolation for the Soviet leadership: beyond the tacit agreement they had with the Western states until that point, the West's non-response in November 1956 gave them full assurance that should any future conflict occur within the boundaries of their empire, they would have a completely free hand, without any concern of Western interference. In this respect, the Hungarian Revolution was to the advantage of the Soviet state. Any uncertainty instilled by American psychological warfare and by the Eisenhower Administration's rhetoric about achieving the "liberation of the enslaved nations," which had seemed to threaten the Soviets' East-Central European buffer zone, practically disappeared.

It is clear that the Hungarian Revolution and its repression did not cause a genuine crisis in world politics. Simply put, it did not lead to (or even come close to provoking) a direct conflict between the two superpowers and their military blocs. Most international public opinion, however, believed that the events represented a serious crisis; the ardent liberation propaganda that the Americans had promulgated with such intensity right up until October 1956 had left many with the belief that such an event as a popular revolution in a Soviet satellite would necessarily result in conflict between East and West. The firm public stance of the Americans against the Soviet intervention, the debates and resolutions of the UNGA emergency session, the concurrent Suez crisis, and the Soviet missile threats, suggested to many observers that the Hungarian Revolution was in fact a serious superpower crisis.

Consequently, the Hungarian Revolution's real significance in terms of international politics was never clearly recognized by the public, neither in the Western states nor in the Eastern bloc. On the contrary, the parallel events in Hungary and Poland and the Suez crisis did, and still do, encourage mythical interpretations of the West's inaction. These explanations, instead of seeing the West's non-response as a result of the general acceptance of the post-Yalta status quo, attempt to portray it as being due to one or other exceptional situations that only applied to the *particular* case of the Hungarian Revolution. Thus oft-quoted arguments were conjured up: that the crisis in the Middle East prevented the Western states from presenting a united front against the Soviet Union, or that the American leadership was occupied with the upcoming presidential election, or that Secretary of State Dulles was taken to the hospital during the most critical days, or that the American troops were prevented from deploying to Hungary by geography alone.

The Hungarian Revolution and its suppression disturbed for a brief moment the *détente* process that had been developing since 1953, but by and large it did not halt the process nor even influence its later development. The tensions that the Soviet intervention and ensuing Western reproaches caused were largely confined to the level of propaganda. All this had no impact on the United States' (or France's and Britain's) and the Soviets' readiness for negotiation, and so

consequently the spring of 1957 brought the revival of a mutual political discourse. By the end of that year, intensive preparations for a summit were underway.

Within these few months, however, the relationship of the two superpowers underwent a radical, unprecedented change that completely redefined world politics. By the summer of 1957, the Soviet Union had developed the first generation of intercontinental ballistic missiles, conducted the first successful test of those missiles in August, and then launched the first satellite, Sputnik, in October. The new Soviet missiles posed a threat not only to Western Europe but directly to the territory of the United States, whose strategic invulnerability vanished overnight. In this way, the so far theoretical balance of power had begun to become real and from then on the arms race was only a question of which party could threaten its adversary with more missiles. This turn of events bolstered to an almost irrational degree the self-confidence of Soviet leaders, Khrushchev most of all. Although willing to negotiate, and even often initiated talks, they now stood on fundamentally different ground and negotiated from a much stronger position. Between 1955 and 1956, when the Soviet-American relationship had undergone its most significant improvement since 1945, the Soviet Union was interested in reaching an agreement with the United States, especially concerning the arms control even if that required significant compromises. From the middle of 1957, on the other hand, the Soviets tried to use the negotiations merely for political gain and to improve their own position. The dramatically changed strategic situation, and most importantly the newly confident Soviet position, led to the abandonment of calls often heard in the late fifties for "total disarmament" for the frenzied arms race of the sixties and seventies.

Taking all this into account, perhaps it would not be a completely unfounded hypothesis to say that if the Hungarian Revolution had not disturbed the détente process by halting the negotiations for these crucial few months, the superpowers might have been able to come to an agreement resulting in a lower rate of armament and consequently reduced world tension in the following decades. There is, however, another argument that could be made, similarly based upon the question of what might have happened if the détente process had not been interrupted by the events of 1956. According to this line of reasoning, the burdens of the arms race, which were dictated by the Americans, would have been averted or at least delayed. This arms race, the argument continues, virtually crippled the Soviet economy and possibly led to its utter collapse. Such a political development, therefore, could have lengthened the era of stagnation by decades, and naturally, concludes this line, the fall of the Eastern European Communist regimes could not have happened at the end of the eighties. Both arguments have compelling elements, and, as is the case with all counterfactual historical speculations, there is no way of knowing which scenario would have played out.

The United Nations and the Third World

The only forum of international relations where the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution gained considerable significance was the United Nations. The second UNGA emergency session (the first dealt with Suez) on November 4, initiated by the United States, and the 11th UNGA session during November and December, produced several resolutions asking the Soviet Union to withdraw their troops and the Kádár government to receive the UN secretary-general and UN observers. Since the Hungarian government refused to cooperate, the UN had no chance to investigate the situation on the ground. To get around the problem, the UN set up a special committee in January 1957 to compile a report on the exact course and nature of events in Hungary, based upon the accounts of those who had taken part in the Revolution and then fled to the West, and upon any other sources available at the time. The report, completed by June 1957, evaluated the uprising as a spontaneous and instinctive expression of the Hungarian nation's striving for freedom.[61] The UNGA emergency session endorsed the report with an overwhelming majority in September. Nevertheless, they repeatedly failed to enforce any decisions regarding

---

[61] *Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary* (New York: United Nations, 1957).

Hungary and the Hungarian question fruitlessly continued to be on the UN agenda year after year until 1962.[62]

What lay behind the UN policy towards Hungary was first and foremost the intention of the American diplomatic forces to regain some of the prestige they had lost during the Revolution from their inaction. The Eisenhower Administration wanted to show the world and the American public that while they could not risk a superpower crisis to help the cause of the Hungarian Revolution, after its suppression they were willing to commit themselves thoroughly to make the aftermath somewhat bearable. But all this had to be done in a subtle way so that the condemnation of the Soviet intervention would not jeopardize the *détente* process that had had such promising results in 1956, and which the US government was determined to develop further. The UNGA provided an ideal playground for this political see-saw game, given that its resolutions were far from being coercive measures, especially not when they condemned a superpower or its allies. Since this was a well-known fact in Moscow, the Americans were hoping that the Soviets, who had not shown the least concern about international public opinion, would not be seriously distressed.

Under these circumstances, the Hungarian question should have been on the agenda for a few months, maybe even a few years, but certainly not until the early sixties. Nevertheless, two important factors in international politics, both reinforcing the strategic position of the Soviet Union, steered the UN into a different direction. One of them, the Suez crisis, was not an actual conflict between the two opposing dominant military blocs, yet its aftermath had a significant long-term impact on the superpower relationship. The rectification of the shaky situation in the Middle East, even though largely brought about by the United States, unexpectedly worked in the Soviets' favor in the end. Most of those African and Asian developing countries who had declared their solidarity with Egypt had also condemned the Soviet intervention in Hungary, but their real interest was to see how certain regimes would react to the Western "imperialist aggression" against a vulnerable developing country. The fact that the United States for the first time in the history of the Western alliance publicly opposed Britain and France in the UN made a far less significant impact upon Third World countries than did the Soviet missile threats against the Anglo-French-Israeli coalition, which were carried out with a brilliant sense of timing. The missile threats seemed to suggest that the Soviet Union was not afraid of getting involved in a military conflict with the West when the freedom of a neutral state was at stake, even though Moscow had only decided to send telegraphs to the French, English, and Israeli leaders on November 5, when the American intervention had already made it obvious that the crisis would be solved without much further ado.

The other important factor behind the long duration of the Hungarian issue on the UN agenda was the launch of Sputnik, which indicated to the whole world that the Soviet Union had surpassed the United States in a crucial scientific and technical field. This event had boosted the USSR's international prestige to an extent comparable only to the popularity of the Red Army during World War II. These two factors, the missile threats in the Suez crisis and the launch of Sputnik, created such favorable circumstances for increasing their influence in Africa and Asia that the Soviets could not help but take advantage of the situation.

The American leadership, on the other hand, was--understandably--deeply worried about this turn of events. As described earlier, the Eisenhower Administration had never seriously considered liberating the Eastern European countries by force, but had maintained the Truman Administration's overall policy of "containing" the expansion of Communism, and had several times acted within this framework (e.g., Guatemala, Taiwan). In the last half of the fifties, they found themselves facing the imminent danger that the Soviet Union would exploit their newly improved position and expand their influence peacefully, successfully copying the United States' own policy of providing economic and financial aid. This is why, from 1956 and 1957 on, a primary aim of US foreign policy was to arrest the development of Soviet influence in the Third World, and to increase correspondingly the American presence there. By highlighting this example of Soviet "imperialism," the American tactic of keeping the Hungarian question on the UNGA

---

[62] The treatment of the Hungarian issue in the UN is thoroughly analyzed in János Radványi: op. cit.

agenda served the goal of promoting US influence among non-aligned countries. The heated UNGA polemics over the years were not supposed to make the Soviet Union change their ways--there was no chance that the "defendant," pleading guilty, would withdraw its troops from Hungary and leave the country to its own course. Instead, the intent was to sway the "jury", i.e. the non-aligned states, and to cajole them into accepting or preserving Western political ideology. This helps explain why the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia never became the perennial "Czechoslovakian question" in the UN, as Hungary had, since this would not have aided similar Western designs.

The United States

In the aftermath of the Revolution, the Eisenhower Administration found itself under attack by the Western press, accused of first having urged the Hungarians to revolt and then abandoning them when they did. By mid-November 1956, the US leadership had come up with an answer to its critics, declaring that while government officials had always been deeply concerned about the "enslaved nations"--and had continuously expressed this concern--they had never encouraged suicidal uprisings.[63] This explanation was hardly convincing, yet its significance should not be underestimated. It was no less than a clear and open admission that, should a similar uprising occur in the future, Eastern Europe could not expect any material help at all from the United States. At the same time, the Administration's explanation also demonstrated that the US propaganda machine could no longer capriciously alternate between the themes of "liberation" and "peaceful liberation."

Following the Polish and Hungarian events, US policy toward Eastern Europe was reformulated on a new, more reserved, basis.[64] Apparently, the basic principles of this new policy had been in the making as early as the summer of 1956. The two East-Central European crises (with their dramatically differing outcomes) simply reinforced the realization that the US could not make more than limited tactical moves in the East European arena. The new American approach toward the region, which aimed to "soften" the regimes, was the beginning of a policy that lasted until the late 1980s. Western states exerted political influence and pressure on Eastern governments through economic support, allowances, loans, and cultural and interstate relations, with the aim of encouraging those Eastern regimes to pursue more liberal domestic policies, and to become as independent as possible from the Soviet Union in foreign affairs. But all this happened within an official--not only *de facto* but increasingly *de jure*--Western and American recognition of the European status quo, which was finally enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki accords. Therefore, the "liberation" of the enslaved nations only cropped up in a limited context after 1956, i.e., within the long-term competitive struggle between the two opposing political and economic systems.

The American leadership was already operating under this new pragmatic policy in the UN when dealing with the Hungarian crisis. Following several years of ineffectual US condemnation of the Russian intervention in the UN General Assembly, secret negotiations were initiated between the US government and the Kádár regime in 1960. The direct result of this dialogue was that Washington allowed the Hungarian question to be removed from UNGA's agenda in December 1962, in exchange for which the Hungarian government in 1963 granted a general amnesty to the majority of those who had been imprisoned because of their participation in the 1956 events.[65]

---

[63] Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, pp. 417-418.

[64] For the presentation of the changes in the Eisenhower Administration's policy toward Eastern Europe see Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, chap. 9.

[65] For the story of the Hungarian-American secret talks see János Radványi, *Hungary and the Superpowers: The 1956 Revolution and Realpolitik* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979). From March 1962 he was chargé d'affaires of the Hungarian legation in Washington and personally involved in the negotiations.

The Soviet Union

Understandably, the Soviets disapproved of Hungary's continual inclusion on the UN agenda, and so, irony-proof, they accused the Western states of intervening in Hungarian internal affairs. Moscow had expected the American leadership to show indifference toward the issue in public, just as they had pragmatically acknowledged that the Soviet Union pacified a turbulent situation in a country within her sphere of influence. Following the logical supposition, which later proved to be true enough, that future international politics would be determined largely by the rival superpowers, the Soviets had hoped that the United States would subordinate comparatively minor issues such as Hungary to the overall bilateral relationship.

This effort is manifest in a telegram that Bulganin sent to Eisenhower on 5 November 1956 which pressed for joint military action by the superpowers in the Middle East and at the same time answered the US president's missive of the previous day with a dismissal of the issue of Soviet intervention in Hungary as the exclusively internal affair of the two states concerned. Two days later, the Soviet Prime Minister telegrammed his congratulations on Eisenhower's reelection. This was not only something unprecedented in the Cold War up to then; it had further significance in as much as Soviet propaganda had "supported" Eisenhower's Democratic opponent Adlai Stevenson during the Presidential campaign. To emphasize their interest in continuing the détente process, Soviet leaders sent a proposition to Washington on November 17 which suggested substantial reductions in current and future arms levels, showing more flexibility on several issues. Naturally, these well-timed political steps were intended to mitigate international condemnation of the Soviet intervention, yet it would be a mistake to dismiss them as mere propaganda--for in actual fact the Soviet Union was already preparing for a new type of superpower cooperation.

The atmosphere for this potential cooperation, however, was significantly undermined by the UNGA debates over the Hungarian issue, in which the leading states, especially the US, were compelled to condemn Moscow's behavior. The Soviet leaders, who had never been concerned with international public opinion in the Stalinist era, now found it quite uncomfortable that the "peace-loving Soviet Union" was, for months and years at all levels in the UN, being repeatedly denounced as an aggressor. Again, it did not greatly annoy the Soviets in their relations with the West; rather, they worried that keeping the Hungarian issue on the agenda would damage their so-far promising relationship with the developing countries. In the battle for influence in the Third World, however, Suez loomed substantially larger than Hungary, and consequently, the Soviets took the upper hand in this popularity contest, at least in the short term. Western expectations that the USSR's brutal suppression of the Revolution would convince the developing countries of the real nature of Soviet power went unfulfilled. On the contrary, Soviet influence in African and Asian countries reached its peak after 1956, in the sixties.

The secret trial and execution of Imre Nagy and his senior associates at Soviet hands after 4 November 1956 undoubtedly hurt Soviet-Yugoslav relations. The Yugoslav leadership opted to cooperate with the elimination of this group from Hungarian political life only to hasten the consolidation of the jeopardized communist regime. Nevertheless, Tito considered the political asylum that he had granted Nagy and his colleagues in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest as a temporary expedient, simply to get them out of the way. He hoped that, once order could be restored and things returned to normal, they would be readmitted and again allowed to have a stake in Hungarian politics. The reasoning behind this desire was that, should Nagy return to power, the national-communist, Tito-friendly policy which Nagy had pursued *before* October 1956 would be to some extent integrated into the new political system.

Yet the Kádár-Nagy compromise that the Yugoslavs thought was a historical imperative could not be realized in those circumstances, which meant that the grant of asylum soon landed Belgrade in a political minefield. The joint machinations of the Hungarian and Soviet leaderships--the deportation of Nagy and his colleagues to Romania immediately after their voluntary emergence from the embassy in late November 1956, despite written guarantees to Tito--created a precarious situation for Yugoslavia in the eyes of international public opinion. The Yugoslavs could do nothing but react vehemently to the kidnapping of Nagy and his associates. There was soon a

flurry of sharply-worded diplomatic notes between Belgrade and Moscow and Belgrade and Budapest. In the end, both parties were unavoidable forced onto a track that led to a second deterioration of Soviet-Yugoslav relations. Of course, the Nagy case cannot be said to be more than a catalyst in this process, as the worsening of diplomatic relations was primarily the consequence of the Soviets' realization by early 1958 that Yugoslavia would never return to the Soviet bloc, and--still worse from Moscow's point of view--the fact that Belgrade had begun to demand a more and more active role among the non-aligned states.[66]

In the Soviet Union, de-Stalinization halted for a short time after the Hungarian Revolution. Hard-liners in the government, referring to the Hungarian example, were able temporarily to prevent further liberalization. However, after his quashing of the "anti-party" group in the summer of 1957, Krushchev re-initiated the policies he had begun at the 20th party congress. The results of this liberalization campaign were numerous and long-lasting changes in the "building of socialism"--though the bases of the Stalinist political and economic system remained more or less untouched--up until the First Secretary's downfall in 1964. Thus, the failure of the de-Stalinization process commonly associated with Khrushchev and that leader's discharge was not the result of a temporary anti-reform tendency following the Hungarian Revolution. Rather, Khrushchev failed in the end because of his leadership style, his increasingly capricious and unpredictable political actions, which jeopardized the Soviet Union's internal and external stability.

Of course, from a moral point of view, the Hungarian Revolution did reveal that the Soviet Union, which had been making a concerted effort during those years to appear as a reliable and civilized actor in international politics, was able to restore their power in Hungary only with brute force reminiscent of the Stalinist era. However, despite this obvious black mark on their record, the Soviets' international reputation was largely unaffected in the West, except among those leftists and communists who still had faith in the Soviet Union, many of whom were deeply disillusioned.[67] Far more decisive to the Soviet Union's prestige was the process which had

---

[66] See note on Yugoslav sources above.

[67] For left-wing intellectuals who had seen the Soviet Union as a model, or potential model, for socialist society, the Hungarian Revolution offered a test of whether or not it would be possible to realize a socialist system which managed to incorporate Western political democratic principles and the principles of common property and social equality. This is why the brutal suppression of the Hungarian Revolution had such a negative effect not only upon West European communist parties but upon the leftwings of socialist and social democratic parties as well. As a result of 1956, the New Left and Euro-Communist movements of the sixties decisively detached themselves from Soviet influence and sought other models for their ideal of socialism.

Aside from those in the Left, most in the West saw the Hungarian Revolution as an oppressed nation's instinctive strike for freedom, an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist uprising. Accordingly, these people, who took part in someimtes violent demonstrations condemning the Soviet intervention, protested not so much against the invasion itself--which after all was the expected reaction from a superpower--as against the passivity of their own governments. The long-running liberation propaganda of the United States, widely considered the leading power of the Western world, had led many to believe that the West would naturally help any attempt for freedom, such as the Revolution, behind the Iron Curtain. Understandably then, the Western public was stunned by the plight of the Hungarian people (who otherwise could never have expected much sympathy because of Hungary's role in the World War II), as they revolted against the immensely superior power of the Soviet empire, jeopardizing their lives, existence, and families in a heroic, tragic, and--according to political logic and common sense--irrational struggle for freedom, all the while the Western governments did next to nothing.

Freedom was the most abstract of ideals in the Western world, and the most important one at the same time, though also something for which the citizens of the consolidated post-war states no longer had to sacrifice their lives. The general public of the West had to face the fact that their governments, by pursuing a passive foreign policy and protecting the interests of their own societies, had failed in their roles as paragons of liberty. It became obvious that the West--with its pragmatic political considerations--would not risk conflict for the ideal of (others') liberty.

The failure of the West to act in 1956 brought to many the disillusioning realization that the self-created socio-political image of the Western democracies--that they were the ultimate supporters of universal democratic

started in 1955-56 and peaked in the sixties by which it emerged as a credible superpower rival/partner of the United States. The Americans' overt acknowledgment of the European status quo in 1956 contributed to this new give-and-take relationship. Consequently, the intentions of the two superpowers and the state of their relations increasingly determined the course of international politics.

The Eastern Bloc

When analyzing the Hungarian Revolution's international repercussions, it is extremely difficult to determine how and to what extent the suppression of the uprising influenced the relationship between the Soviet Union and other Eastern European communist states. Undoubtedly, a new kind of relationship emerged between the Soviet Union and her allies after 1956, but this cannot be entirely ascribed to the Hungarian Revolution. The basic principles of this new confederate policy, in keeping with the post-Stalinist model, were already visible in the Soviet government's official statement of 30 October 1956 affirming the principle of equality in relations among socialist states. The declaration--contrary to previous interpretations--was not merely an improvised gesture to pacify the Eastern European crisis, but in fact had been in preparation for months, was intended to redefine the relationship of the allied states, and was only amended to suit the specific situation of that October.

Indeed, the October 30 declaration can in some ways be construed as the "constitution" of the post-Stalinist model. It provided a broad outline for the Soviet Union's East European allies of their possibilities and limitations, and established new equations for political control and economic cooperation. The guidelines for the Bloc countries that the Soviets established in October 1956 remained more or less operative almost intact until 1989. The declaration promised no less than "a steadfast policy that realizes Lenin's principle of equal rights of nations," including respect for their sovereignty, historical past, and individual national characteristics. In imperial parlance it was a codification of a political relationship more flexible than that which had existed previously but that was still far from being equitable.

The new relationship between Moscow and its East European allies also included the recall of Soviet advisors. After 1956, the system of direct Soviet control exerted through these locally placed agents was refined to a more sophisticated system of "remote control." The Soviets also replaced the vaguely disguised economic arrangement which had amounted to little more than Soviet exploitation with one that distributed both benefits and liabilities more evenly.

Of course, along with all the elements of new Soviet flexibility that the October 30 declaration implied, it also clearly set limits defining which changes would be possible and tolerable--reforms were permitted, provided they maintained socialist ideology (i.e., the Soviet Bolshevik system) and the confederate structure (i.e., the Soviet empire). This is why the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution actually accorded with the Soviet government declaration--something denied by many at the time.

One specific article in the declaration, which promised that Moscow would examine the question of Soviet troops stationed in Eastern Europe, was added to the draft in reference to the Polish and Hungarian events. This promise was certainly intended as a political tranquilizer, but later the same issue became a key factor in Soviet alliance politics. The Western states' unconditional acceptance of the post-war European status quo and the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe in 1956 significantly increased Soviet security and, at the same time, altered the reasoning behind the Kremlin's stationing of troops abroad. This is why Soviet troops could be withdrawn from Romania in 1958, for the geo-political situation of that country ensured that the

---

principles--was not entirely true. This awakening perhaps partially spurred the radicalization in the sixties of certain elements of Western society--especially within the younger generations. In this way, the Hungarian Revolution, with its brief history of triumph, tragedy and finally disillusionment, indirectly but certainly contributed to the last "anti-capitalist revolt": the student movements of the sixties.

Soviet political model would be maintained and Romania would remain a solid member of the Soviet bloc. On the other hand, in Czechoslovakia, where Soviet troops had been absent since the end of 1945, the 1968 political crisis was one that the Soviet leadership could only resolve with a military occupation. In order to justify this action, the Soviets had only to allege that the socialist system in Czechoslovakia was in danger and thus needed "protection."

In the last few years, scholars have established that at the time of the Hungarian Revolution and directly after its suppression, there were manifestations of significant public sympathy for the Hungarian cause in nearly all East European states and inside the Soviet Union itself. With the exception of those in Poland, these events met with varying forms of retaliation: dismissal, expulsion from the Party, arrest, detention, imprisonment, even execution. The reaction of the increasingly nationalistic regime in Romania conspicuously illustrates these official campaigns, conducted throughout Eastern Europe, against those who had supported--or who were simply accused of having supported--the uprising in Hungary. The Bucharest government seized the opportunity to eliminate unreliable or discontented political elements, and also exploited the situation to persecute further the Hungarian minority. The regime executed more than twenty people, and imprisoned or interned thousands; altogether, several tens of thousand Romanians were affected by the large-scale political retaliation.[68]

In the decades following 1956, the Revolution yielded several legacies in Eastern Europe: first, the leaders of the various East Europe regimes learned from Hungary's example that attempts at radical party reform can easily lead to the collapse of the communist political monopoly and, second, they learned that in such cases the Soviets would not hesitate to restore order by any means necessary, including the most brutal ones. Conversely, however, the Hungarian Revolution also demonstrated that East European leaders could ignore social demands and public opinion only at their peril. Even though they had seen that any threatened regime could rely on Soviet help in the event of some political crisis, that leadership, which would be held responsible, could also expect to share the fate of the Gero group in Hungary, that is, to be replaced.

In this way, the Hungarian Revolution, by setting such a drastic example, contributed to a large extent to the success of the attempt--which had begun at the 20th CPSU Congress of in February 1956--to build a post-Stalinist communist model in the Soviet Union and throughout East-Central Europe. The October 1956 Polish crisis, with its contrasting positive example, also strengthened the same trend; it demonstrated that a limited campaign of moderate reforms, which did not directly threaten the political system or indirectly threaten the security of the Eastern military bloc, could be realized even against the will of the Soviet leadership. More than anything else, this experience motivated the Czechoslovak communist reformers in 1968. Unlike Gomulka, however, they were unable to limit social changes to a level that the Soviets could tolerate.

The final legacy of the events of 1956 and shortly after was that they effectively ended any ideas that still existed in Eastern Europe that the Soviet yoke could be thrown off by active revolt. The inaction of the West, the cruelty of the Soviet intervention, and finally the irrationally broad scale of retaliation all combined to dispel that illusion. Over the decades that followed, this understanding became the basis of all self-regulated reform activities in Eastern-bloc states. While consciously taking the security interests of the Soviet Union into account, those wishing for change worked gradually but effectively to liberalize the communist system. But they no longer aimed to overthrow it.

---

[68] See footnote on Romanian sources above.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

During the last few years I conducted archival research on East-West relations in the 1950s and on Western reaction to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in the following archives (most important files and collections):

Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
A.W. Dulles Papers.
J.F. Dulles Papers.
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KA
D.D. Eisenhower, Papers as President of the United States (Ann Whitman File)
D.D. Eisenhower, Records as President, White House Central Files. Confidential Files
C.D. Jackson Papers.
White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records of Paul T. Carroll, Andrew J. Goodpastor, L. Arthur Minnich. and Christopher H. Russell.
White House Office. National Security Council Staff: Papers,
J.F. Dulles Papers
National Archives, Washington, DC.
National Security Council Reports, Record Group (RG) 273.
Department of State, Central Decimal Files, RG 59.
Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 330.
Papers of Admiral Radford, RG 218
Records of US Department of State. Office of Public Opinion Studies, RG 59.
United Nations Archives, New York, NY.
PSCA Confidential Notes, Chronological Summary regardig Hungary, Andrew Cordier File.
National Security Archive, Washington, DC.
Public Record Office, London, Kew, England
Cabinet meetings, Prime Minister A. Eden papers
Foreign Secretary S. Lloyd papers
Foreign Office, General Correspondence
Magyar Országos Levéltár, Budapest (Hungarian National Archives)
Records of the Hungarian Laborers Party and the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party
Minutes of the Council of Ministers
Ministry for External Affaires

Official and other publications of primary sources were also of great help, particularly:

Documents Diplomatiques francais 1956. Tome III.(24 octobre-31 décembre) (Paris, Ministére des Affaires Étrangéres, 1990) (referred to in footnotes as DDF 1956 Tome III.)

Éva Gál, András B. Hegedûs, György Litván, Janos M. Rainer, eds., *A "Jelcin-dosszié". Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról. [The Yeltsin File. Soviet Documents on 1956]* (Budapest: Századvég K.--1956-os Intézet, 1993). (Referred to in the notes as *The "Yeltsin Dossier."*)

Vjacseszlav Szereda and Alekszandr Sztikalin, eds., *Hiányzó lapok 1956 történetébôl. Dokumentumok a volt SZKP KB Levéltárából. [Missing Pages from the History of 1956: Documents from the Archives of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party]* (Budapest: Móra, 1993). (Referred to in the notes as *Missing Pages.*)

Vjacseszlav Szereda and Janos M. Rainer, eds. *Döntés a Kremlben, 1956. A szovjet pártelnökség vitái Magyarországról [Decisions in the Kremlin, 1956: Soviet Politburo Debates on Hungary]* (Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1996).

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Eastern Europe, Volume XXV (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990). (Referred to in the notes as *FRUS, 1955-1957*, Vol 25.)

Eva Haraszty--Taylor, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. A Collection of Documents from the British Foreign Office* (Nottingham, Eng.: Astra Press, 1995).

Sándor Geréb, ed., *Titkos jelentések 1956. október 23.--november 4 [Secret Reports, 23 October-4 November 1956]*, (Budapest: Hírlapkiadó Vállalat, 1989.)

József Kiss, Zoltán Ripp, and István Vida, eds., *Top Secret. Magyar-jugoszláv kapcsolatok. 1956. Dokumentumok. [Documents on Hungarian-Hungarian Relations, 1956]* (Budapest: MTA Jelenkor-kutató Bizottság, 1995).

United Nations. Security Council. Official Records (Eleventh Year), 734th--755th Meetings inclusive. New York: 1956.
United Nations. General Assembly. Official Records. First and Second Emergency Special Sessions, 1--10 November 1956. Plenary Meetings and Annexes. New York: 1956.
United Nations. General Assembly. Official Records. Eleventh Session (1956--57). Plenary Meetings. Vol. I (12 Nov. 1956 -- 8 March, 1957, 574th -- 617th Meetings). New York, 1956-1957.

United Nations. General Assembly. Official Records. Eleventh Session. Supplement No. 18 (A/3592), "Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary." New York 1957.

Paul E. Zinner, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe: A Selection of Documents on Events in Poland and Hungary, February--November 1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Csaba Békés is a senior research fellow at the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Budapest. He received his Ph.D. in 1989 from Szeged University where he was a visiting lecturer on post-World War II Hungarian foreign policy from 1990 to 1992. Békés also received a visiting fellowship from the Cold War International History Project which enabled him to conduct research in American archives. This paper is part of his work toward a book on the Great Powers' reaction to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution; part of this paper appeared, in a different form, in Gyorgy Litvan, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Reform, Revolt, and Repression, 1953-1963* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), which was prepared by a team of scholars, including Békés, at the 1956 Institute.

Research for this paper was supported by the Open Society Foundation Research Support Scheme, Prague; the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC; the National Security Archive, Washington, DC; and the Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique, Bern.